

IN THIS ISSUE: The 'new man' who saved Rome: Gaius Marius at war

# ANCIENT WARFARE

VOL V, ISSUE 1

## The 'new man' who saved Rome: Gaius Marius at war

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# The *linothorax* Debate

Dear Editor,

I read with interest Paul Bardunias' article on the 'linothorax', or tube-and-yoke corslet. Of particular interest I found Paul's comments on how some materials, such as certain types of hide, should probably be discounted from the list of possibilities for what the armour was made from as it is not white (as per many of the vase illustrations that are the basis for our understanding for this piece of equipment) or how other materials, such as glued linen, seem unlikely as they are prone to absorb moisture.

One important piece of evidence for the construction of this armour that the author seems to have missed appears in chapter 2 of Aelian's *Strategikon*. In this chapter, Aelian outlines the different types of armour worn by the various contingents of infantry found within a Hellenistic army. Aelian clearly describes how the light infantry and skirmishers wore no armour at all and how men armed as classical hoplites were still wearing the bronze plate armour of the earlier classical period. Importantly, Aelian describes the Hellenistic pikeman as wearing a lighter type of armour, most likely the tube-and-yoke corslet, called an *Argilos* style of armour.

The term *Argilos* means 'white clay'. As such, it appears that the tube-and-yoke corslet was covered with a finishing layer of clay based 'whitewash' over which various designs were painted. This thin layer of clay would make any material (hide, glued linen, or stitched linen) quite stiff and moisture proof if applied to both the inside and outside of the armour. A covering of whitewash may also explain why there are so few depictions of stitching in representations of the corslet in vase illustrations. Unfortunately, this passage of Aelian's does not address the question of what the armour was actually made of and it now leaves the debate over its composition wide open with any material still being a possibility. However, it does answer the question of the armour's colour, and correlates

with the depiction of the corslet in vase illustrations and tomb paintings. I look forward to following the future of the debate over the understanding of this important piece of ancient military equipment with a great deal of interest.



Dr. Christopher Matthew

## II Adiutrix' base in Nijmegen found

In 19 BC, the Romans founded a legionary base on the Hunerberg, east of Batavodorum (modern Nijmegen, Netherlands), the capital of the Batavians. Even when the legions were transferred and the soldiers' expenditure disappeared as a source of income, this civil settlement continued to flourish.

As is well known, the Batavians revolted during the Year of the Four Emperors. Tacitus writes that when the Roman general Cerialis arrived to restore order in 70, the rebels set fire to Batavodurum (*Histories* 5.19). The Roman historian also says that the site was occupied by the Second Legion Adiutrix (5.20).

Recently, archaeologist Harry van Enckevort has identified the remains of a *praetorium* and a ditch of a hitherto unknown fortress. The absence of objects from the Flavian period suggests that it was built immediately after the revolt had been suppressed, which can only mean that its inhabitants were soldiers of Legio II Adiutrix. Built on the ash layer of Batavodurum, the fortress controlled a new civil settlement, more to the west, called Noviomagus.

The stone foundations of the *praetorium* prove that II Adiutrix was supposed to stay in Nijmegen. Eventually, however, it followed Cerialis to Britain and was replaced by X *Gemina*, which settled on the Hunerberg again.

## Paul Bardunias responds

Dear Editor,

What Dr. Matthew describes is akin to what is called 'pipeclaying', after the white clay used to make pipes and also applied in a thin layer to items of kit to whiten them. While this could whiten a shell of leather or textile, pipeclaying was used to touch up base materials that were already of a desired color. Related products were used into the last century and colored to match uniform shades such as khaki. The clay itself is hydrophilic and would absorb water and spall off, so traditional pipeclaying recipes call of the use of various gums and glues as sealants. It may have been easier to bleach the textile or leather base than apply a temporary clay coating, and the benefit of a layer of clay thick enough to be protective would have to be balanced against simply adding another layer of bleached base material.

The section of Aelian that Dr. Matthew cites has vexed scholars. Some have seen in the word *argilos* a bright white tunic, others took the word to imply 'flashy', but I agree that the word should be understood to literally mean white clay. A type of fine white clay, known to us as kaolin, was widely used by the ancient Greeks. It was a white pottery glaze, and a slip of kaolin formed the drawing surface on white-ground *lekythoi*, which became popular in early the 5th century. Theophrastus of Eresos, on Lesbos, in his late 4th century treatise *On Stones*, described possible kaolins as Melian and Samian earths. They were commonly used in fulling and bleaching textiles.

We are benefited in our study of ancient armor that



textile body armor has come back into fashion. A recent study showed that the ability of Kevlar armor to defeat spike and knife threats can be significantly increased if kaolin is not applied on the outside, but intercalated into the weave. The clay stiffens through a process called 'shear-thickening', wherein the clay-coated fibers are pliable if slowly pushed against, but resist sliding past each other at speed and present a hard surface to fast impact. This effect can be seen by stabbing a thick slurry of corn starch. I have used kaolin to improve the performance of linen panels of a weight and weave approximating that used by the ancient Greeks. The results of testing these panels according to National Institute of Justice protocols for body armor are forthcoming.

Reinforcement with kaolin has an advantage over other techniques proposed to make textile T-Y corsets in that the clay was a component of creation of linen. A clear evolution of the armor from clay-rich, white linen is easy to envision. The T-Y became popular at Athens not long before the appearance of white-ground pottery, perhaps reflecting an increase in imports of fine kaolin for a variety of tasks. Our only source for the form of the T-Y comes from images on vases, so perhaps it is fitting that the culture that made this pottery famous was spread, not by ranks of bronze, but by ranks of clay.

Paul Bardunias

### Themes and deadlines

The upcoming themes are as follows:

- V.2 Bodyguards of kings and emperors
- V.3 Rome's wars with the Sassanids
- V.4 The Assyrian army at war (April 20th)
- V.5 The fleets of Imperial Rome (June 20th)

If you have a proposal that fits our themes, we'd be interested to hear from you to discuss the possibility of publishing an article. Send your proposal – including the angle you propose to take, ideas for illustrations and artwork and your qualifications – to [editor@ancient-warfare.com](mailto:editor@ancient-warfare.com). Do make sure you send them before the proposal deadlines mentioned above.

### News items

Additions for this section

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THESE CHARIOT THINGS BECOMING A REALLY  
BIG SUCCESS."**

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# The 'new man' who saved Rome

## Historical introduction

MARIUS' LIFE SPANS A TIME WHEN THE OLD REPUBLIC STRUGGLES TO ADJUST TO THE NEW REALITIES BROUGHT BY HER DOMINION OVER THE *OIKUMENE*, A TIME THAT INAUGURATES A LONG CENTURY OF DISTRESS THAT FINALLY WOULD PAINFULLY GIVE BIRTH TO THE PRINCIPATE UNDER ONE OCTAVIAN - AUGUSTUS.

By Alberto Pérez

Rome's victory in the Hannibalic War started off an extraordinary expansion throughout the Mediterranean that amazed contemporaries, such as the Greek historian Polybius. At the time of Gaius Marius' birth in 157 BC, Rome directly controlled territories that ranged from the Atlantic Ocean to Macedonia, and her power was uncontested by the once proud Hellenistic kingdoms of the Seleucids and the Lagids. This process of conquest would continue over the following decades, fuelled by the competitive ethos of the Roman aristocracy, which with foreign expansion could kill two birds with one stone: show her *virtus* and enormously increase her wealth through war-booty and the squeezing of conquered territories. Although senatorial families strove to maintain their monopoly over the lucrative magistracies, the widening of opportunities gave chances to individuals of lower birth to bid for them. Gaius Marius was one of these *homines novi* ("new men") from equestrian families without previous presence in the Senate, and his career exemplifies the struggle of these wealthy upstarts to have access to the higher offices of the state.

### Spain: lessons learnt the hard way

In Spain, divided into the provinces of Further Spain and Nearer Spain, Rome was involved in an unpleasant and unprofitable conflict against the warlike tribes of the Celtiberians and the Lusitanians. Several Roman armies suffered major defeats, and the war was so unpopular that in 151 Rome

had serious difficulties recruiting levies to be sent there, something without precedent. Not even military tribunes volunteered, and the men designed *legati* by the consuls refused to serve, until shamed by a young Cornelius Scipio, later known as Africanus, who came forward. In 133 BC this same man would put an end to that "fiery war" (see AW I.4) with the siege of Numantia, in what was the first campaign of a certain Gaius Marius.

Although Plutarch made him of humble origins, Marius was probably a member of the equestrian order, and perhaps he travelled to Spain in Scipio's retinue. In any case he quickly attracted the consul's attention because of his bravery – he defeated an enemy in single combat – and readiness to accept the hardships of military life. Marius, without doubt an outstanding pupil, took good note of the lessons taught: the hard discipline that gained his legionaries the nickname of 'Marius' mules' mirrored the regime imposed by Scipio on the demoralized and unruly legions of Spain. And the cunning way in which Scipio conducted the operations against Numantia, refusing a pitched battle and encircling the *oppidum* until hunger forced its surrender, probably inspired him in the campaign that would end with his victory of Aquae Sextiae over the Teutones and Ambrones. He fortified his camp – an art in which Marius excelled, as even Sulla recognized, and let the enemy pass by, ignoring their provocations and carefully pursuing them until the occasion was ripe. As Roman generals knew, *dolabra* (pick-axe) and logistics were as important in winning battles as *pilum* and *gladius*.

Scipio's campaign also showed

another trend in the Roman army, one that would have a tremendous impact in the political development of the Republic. Recruitment of volunteers (even slaves, as after Cannae) had happened before in moments of crisis (*tumultus*), but when Scipio was chosen consul: "He did not take any army by levy because the city was exhausted by so many wars, and because there were plenty of soldiers in Spain [...] he took a certain number of volunteers sent to him by cities and kings on the score of private friendship. To these were added 500 of his clients and friends whom he joined in one body and called it the troop of friends" (Appian, *Spanish Wars* 84). That is, instead of the usual *dilectus* ("levy") he opted for recruiting a *supplementum* of volunteers. Marius would choose the same expedient in 107 BC, when given command of the war against Jugurtha, king of Numidia and another distinguished veteran of the *Bellum Numantinum*, but he included a distinct novelty: he removed the property qualification hitherto demanded to serve in the legions.

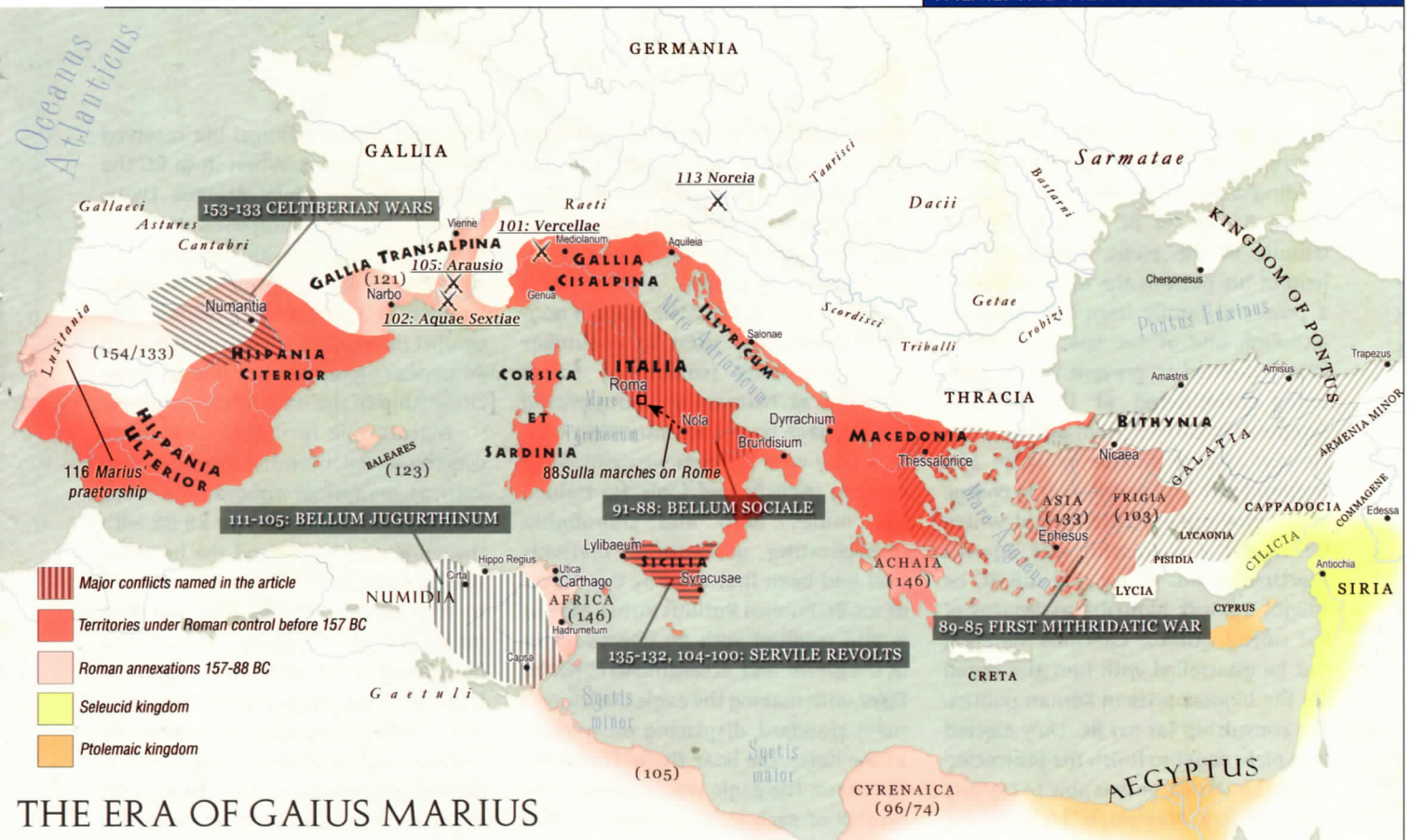
### Proletarii and professionals

In Rome, during the time of the siege of Numantia, the tribune of the plebs Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus was striving to get ahead with his *Lex Sempronia* ("Sempronius' Law"), which intended to ease the impoverishment of Roman peasantry:

"[...] but the men who fight and die for Italy enjoy the common air and light, indeed, but nothing else; houseless and homeless they wander about with their wives and children. [...] they fight and die to support others in wealth and luxury, and though they are styled masters of the world, they have not a single clod of earth that is their own."

Plutarch, Life of Tiberius Gracchus 9





Rome's expansion had taken its toll on Roman and Italian peasants, who predominantly manned the legions. Although much has been said about its actual impact on Italian rural population, it is clear that they first suffered the Hannibalic War, with its cycles of destruction, and then the men were embarked on longer campaigns in faraway places. Casualties and protracted absences meant that their tenures couldn't be appropriately farmed, and at the same time they found increasing competition by the more efficiently cultivated *latifundia* (large estates) of rich landowners. The Roman aristocracy invested the fruits of the conquest in land, and, moreover, the public land (*ager publicus*) that Rome had confiscated all along Italy after the Second Punic War had been largely occupied by them. They devoted these *villae* to vineyards and olive groves that were grown by slaves. The growth of slavery, nurtured by the scores of war captives brought to Italy, exploded sometimes in slave revolts, the most serious being the two Sicilian servile wars (135-132 BC, 104-100 BC) and the insurrection of Spartacus (73-71 BC).

The growing impoverishment of the peasantry was reflected in the progressive lowering of the *census* qualification during the 2nd century

BC. Rome's census roll differentiated between the citizens liable for military service, the *adsidui*, and those who did not reach the minimum property threshold for that, the *proletarii* or *capite censi* ("the head count"). In 214 BC the strains of the Hannibalic War forced a lowering of the minimum from 11,000 to 4,000 asses, and by 129 BC we know it had been further reduced to 1,500 asses. These measures fought the symptoms but not the disease, something that Tiberius Gracchus and, a decade later, his brother Gaius, tried to do with laws to redistribute public land between the poorer Roman citizens and to found new colonies. Senatorial opposition (*optimates*, "the good ones") quenched their attempts in blood, but the land problem remained a key point in the political turmoil of the late Republic and always played a part in the agenda of politicians with popular leanings (*populares*).

Marius acceptance of *proletarii* into the ranks of the legions had more to do with practical reasons than with a desire to ameliorate the situation of the poorer citizens: he needed soldiers. It can be viewed as a logical step in the process of the lowering of the *census* threshold, although not all scholars agree on this interpretation. Some have suggested that the reason behind the

inclusion of the "head count" in the legions was not the lack of propertied manpower, but the lack of willing manpower. The citizens did not register in the census as a way to avoid being sent to Spain, in Lawrence Keppie's words "the Roman equivalent of the Russian front."

Whatever the causes, the consequences of this change in the social composition of the army would be far reaching. Poorer citizens started to contemplate military service as a mean of subsistence, with *stipendium* (pay), booty and the possibility of a land grant upon discharge as strong incentives to enlist. Veterans of the Jugurthine War received land plots in the *provincia* of Africa, and in 100 BC Marius sought the support of the tribune of the plebs Saturninus to get land for the victors over the Cimbri and the Teutones. The continuous service brought professionalism to the legions and forged a strong *esprit de corps*. Now the allegiance of the soldiers lay more in their general than in an abstract notion of state, as he could assure them a fruitful campaign or the desired land allotment. The massive inclusion of Italians after the Social War deepened this indifference towards Rome and her Senate. Soon, the darkest effects of this shift would be noticeable.



### Third founder of Rome

Marius started his political career by holding a military tribunate, perhaps in 123 BC. In 119 BC he was elected tribune of the plebs, thanks to the help of his patrons the *Caecilii Metelli*, a powerful family from the *nobilitas*, although one of the laws he passed (that intended to prevent voters from being intimidated at the *comitia*) temporarily turned them against him. He was elected *praetor* in 115 BC and *propraetor* the following year in charge of the province of Further Spain, where he waged a successful war against the Lusitanians. In 109 and 108 BC he fought against Jugurtha as *legatus* of the consul Quintus Caecilius Metellus, but he quarrelled with him and opted for the biggest prize in Roman politics: the consulship for 107 BC. Duly elected by a *plebs* eager to finish the protracted conflict in Africa, he was able to capture the slippery Numidian king in 105 BC thanks to the mediation of Lucius Cornelius Sulla with king Bocchus of Mauretania.

Marius was the man of the hour, and naturally he was chosen consul for 104 BC to face a threat that resurrected Roman fears of a Gallic invasion. The migrating tribes of the Cimbri, Teutones and Ambrones had defeated a string of Roman armies, the battle of Arausio (105 BC) being the bloodiest episode, with 80,000 Roman and Italian casualties as a result of the discord between their commanders, the noble Quintus Servilius Caepio and the *homo novus* Mallius Maximus. But instead of attacking Italy, the tribes gave Marius a respite of two years that he spent on training his army, being elected consul again in 103 and in 102 BC.

It was probably during this lapse that Marius carried out the reforms traditionally attributed to him. In the tactical sphere, the old maniples gave way to the cohort. Composed of three maniples, one of each of the previous lines of *hastati*, *principes* and *triarii*, the cohort had probably been in use since the Second Punic War, but now it definitely became the chief sub-unit in the legion, thus composed of ten cohorts that usually arrayed for battle in three lines (the *triplex acies*). The inclusion of *proletarii* and the subsequent standardization of a panoply that had

to be supplied by the state may have played its part in this change, and also in the disappearance of the *velites*, who are no longer mentioned in our sources after the Jugurthine War.

Marius improved the legion's mobility, getting rid of the mass of non-combatants that used to encumber her movements (something Scipio also did at Numantia), reorganizing the baggage train and entrusting each legionary with his own weapons, food, cooking utensils and tools. He trained his 'mules' hard and thoroughly, incorporating gladiatorial methods that had been first used by the consul of 105 BC Publius Rutilius Rufus. Marius is also credited with an improvement of the *pilum*, and, according to Pliny the Elder, with making the eagle the legion's main standard, displacing other *signa* as the horse, the boar, the wolf and the minotaur. The eagle would become the symbol of each legion, a focus of that *esprit de corps* already mentioned. Even as late as 62 BC Catiline would still use Marius' old eagle mystique to recruit Marian veterans for his ill-fated coup:

"[...] he himself, with his freedmen and the colonists, took his station by the eagle, which Caius Marius was said to have had in his army in the Cimbrian war."

Sallust, Conspiracy of Catiline 59

All these changes proved beneficial to weathering the northern storm. Marius defeated the Teutones and Ambrones at Aquae Sextiae in 102 BC, and was elected consul for the fifth time. He then destroyed the Cimbri at Vercelle in the summer of 101 BC, being hailed as the third founder of Rome, after Romulus and Camillus, and getting his sixth consulship for 100 BC. Marius was at the peak of his glory, but that was something which never lasted long in the dizzy realms of Roman politics. And as happened with other figures such as Pompey, Marius was never able to assume a secondary role once his moment was gone.

### Dawn of a new era

Italian allies (*socii*) had contributed to the Roman war effort as much as the Romans themselves, but they couldn't

take part in the political life reserved for Roman citizens. When in 91 BC the tribune of the plebs Marcus Livius Drusus, who had proposed granting the citizenship to all Italian *socii*, was murdered, resentment exploded in open war: the *Bellum Sociale*. The conflict lasted until 88 BC, and although Rome was victorious she had to grant citizenship to the Italian communities.

Marius' role in the war had been overshadowed by other commanders, such as his former subordinate Sulla, who was elected consul for 88 BC with the province of Asia (and the lucrative war against Mithridates VI) allotted to him by the Senate. That war had for far too long obsessed Marius, and he manoeuvred with the *popularis* tribune of the plebs Publius Sulpicius Rufus, who passed a bill to transfer the *imperium* (command) from Sulla to Marius. This was more than the *dignitas* of the former could bear. He joined his troops, announced to them that they were going to be replaced by new men for the booty-promising campaign in Asia, and marched with them against Rome to recover his *imperium*. Never before had armed Roman troops crossed the sacred boundary of the city, the *pomerium*, and Sulla's march heralded a new era where political power would rest on the backs of the legionaries rather than in the decisions of the *patres conscripti* and the *comitia*. ■

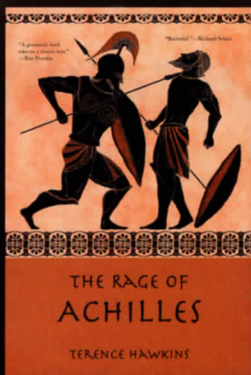
**Alberto Pérez is a regular contributor, and editor of *Desperta Ferro*, a Spanish magazine devoted to ancient and medieval military history. He would like to thank Seán Husmann for his careful proofreading of this article.**

### Further reading

- P. Erdkamp (ed.), *A companion to the Roman Army*. Oxford 2007.
- L. Keppie, *The making of the Roman Army*. London 1984.
- C.A. Matthew, *On the Wings of Eagles: The Reforms of Gaius Marius and the Creation of Rome's First Professional Soldiers*. Newcastle upon Tyne 2010.
- N. Rosenstein and R. Morstein-Marx (eds.), *A companion to the Roman Republic*. Oxford 2006.



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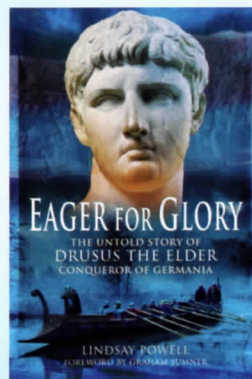
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# Memoirs, monuments and biography

## *The memory of Gaius Marius*

GAIUS MARIUS NARRATED HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY WITH BONES. HE LEFT THE KILLING FIELDS OF AQUAE SEPTIMAE LITTERED WITH THOUSANDS OF UNBURIED BODIES OF GERMANIC MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN. AS THE FLESH ROTTED AND SKULLS BLEACHED, THE SKELETONS COMMUNICATED THEIR GRISLY PROPAGANDA. A VISITOR PASSING THROUGH MARSEILLES WOULD SEE HUMAN REMAINS PROPPING UP FARMERS' VINES, SILENTLY TESTIFYING TO MARIUS' MIGHT IN WAR (PLUTARCH, *MARIUS* 21).

By Tom Hendrickson and Michael J. Taylor

Marius did not leave a memoir written with pen and ink. He did not need to. He told his story in a more traditional manner, through public display and performance. Two magnificent triumphs blazoned his victories over both king Jugurtha of Numidia and the twin Germanic threats of the Teutones and Cimbri. Tens of thousands of Romans saw his parades through the streets of Rome, accompanied by captives, booty and victorious armies. Through the triumphal parade, Marius offered the Roman people a chance to share in his glory. Those that missed the spectacle could see Marius' triumphal chariot minted upon a series of commemorative coins. Marius followed up the transient ritual of the triumph with a program of self-aggrandizing public building. He financed a temple to Honor and Manliness (*honor et virtutis*), vowed while facing the Germanic threat. The city was littered with statues of the victor, further visual mementos for a largely illiterate populace.

Marius had many political enemies in the Roman aristocracy. Like Marius, they sought the traditional display of elite Romans: high office, triumphal spectacles, commemorative coins and public monuments. But they also attempted to commemorate their deeds in a further medium: the autobiography. At least four of Marius' political opponents wrote substantial memoirs: Rutilius Rufus, Lutatius Catulus, Aemilius Scaurus and Cornelius Sulla.

This sudden fury of autobiography contested Marius' unprecedented monopoly on military glory. Sulla emphasized that his enterprise and daring had been crucial in the ultimate capture of King Jugurtha, the *sine qua non* for victory in Numidia. Lutatius Catulus (consul in 102 BC, with Marius) insisted his generalship helped achieve the crushing victory over the Cimbri at Vercellae, and that Marius wrongly denied him his proper share of glory.

In the short term, autobiography was a poor medium to make a case. While Sulla excoriated Marius in his memoirs, he also took more effective measures after installing himself as dictator in 81 BC. He tore down Marius' statues, obliterating him from the public visual record. The positive memory of Marius, however, was not so easy to snuff out. A young aedile named Julius Caesar, Marius' nephew, restored Marius' statues in 65 BC.

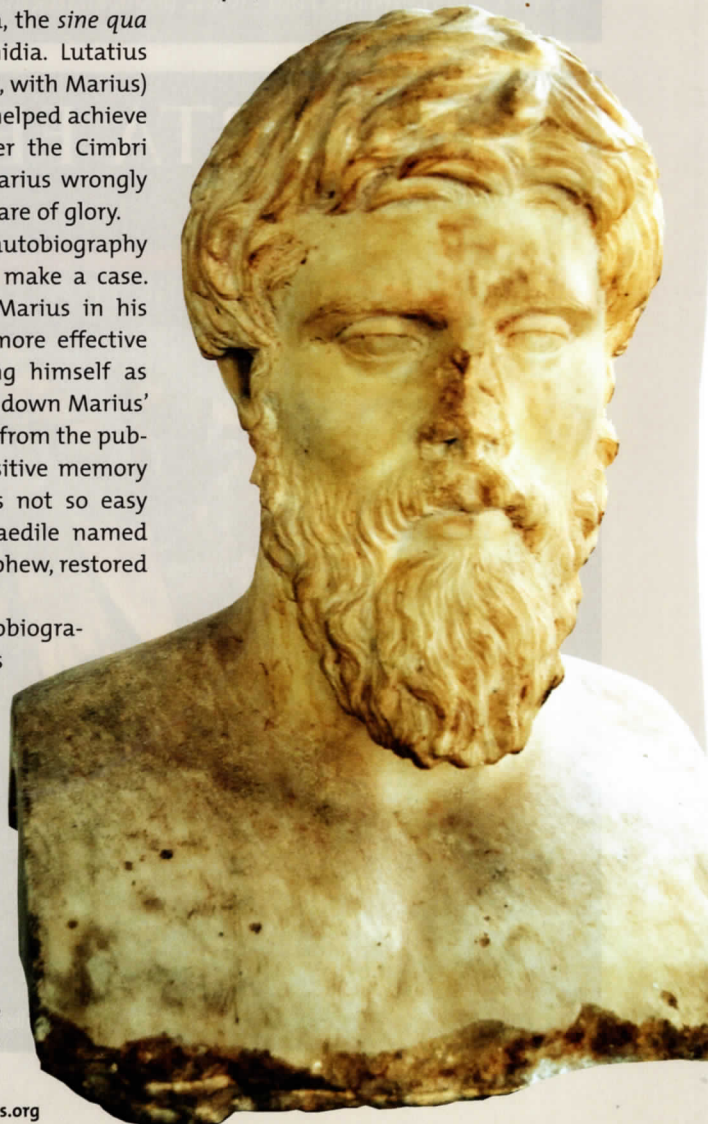
Meanwhile, the autobiographies of Marius' enemies languished. In a treatise on oratory, Cicero commends Lutatius Catulus' memoir to his pupil Brutus, along with the memoirs of Aemilius Scaurus. Young Brutus sheepishly replies that "I must admit that I have not heard of either." (Cicero, *Correspondence with Brutus* 133). Anti-

Marian memoirs were not disseminated widely. They remained obscure manuscripts barely circulating even among the literate aristocracy.

### Augustus' Elogium

The destruction of the Roman Republic between 49-31 BC ironically generated flourishing interest in the sweep of Republican history. Many of the historians writing in this period had strong pro-republican tendencies, men like Asinius Pollio, Varro, Atticus, Cornelius Nepos and Livy. Yet histories written upon

Bust of Plutarch of Chaeronea (46-c.122), now in the Museum of Delphi, Greece.





papyrus rolls were feeble compared to the grand history that Augustus Caesar composed through monumental statues and public inscriptions. Augustus sought to portray his *de facto* monarchic rule as a renewal of the Republic, and himself the culmination of a long line of Republican heroes. To this end, Augustus constructed a massive new forum around his Temple of Mars Ultor (Mars the Avenger; why bother with subtlety?), which was dedicated in 5 BC. One side of the *Forum Augusti* was populated by famous Romans and the other by men from whom Augustus claimed descent. Beneath each statue, Augustus composed a short *elogium*, summarizing each man's worthy deeds.

The *elogium* of Gaius Marius, pieced together from fragments discovered in Rome and reconstructed by Theodor Mommsen with the aid of a 14th century copy from Arezzo (Arretium), thus reads:

"C. Marius, son of Gaius. Consul VII, praetor, tribune of the plebs, quaestor, augur, military tribune. As consul, outside of the lot, he waged war against Jugurtha, king of Numidia. He captured him, and triumphing in his second consulship, ordered him led before his chariot. Absent, he was elected consul for a third time. Consul for the fourth time, he destroyed the army of the Teutones. Consul for the fifth time, he put the Cimbri to flight and triumphed again over these and the Teutones. In his sixth consulship, he preserved the Republic shaken by the sedition of a tribune of the plebs and a praetor, who had occupied the Capitoline Hill with armed force. At the age of 70, expelled from his country by civil violence and restored through armed force, he was made consul for the seventh time. Victorious, he built the temple of Honor and Manliness from the booty taken from the Cimbri and Teutones. With triumphal robes and patrician shoes [he entered the senate?]"

Dessau, ILS 59

This objective, "just the facts" summary of Marius' career is also a masterpiece of Augustan self-justification. Marius' *elogium* is the longest so far recovered, suggesting Augustus deliberately devoted more attention to Marius' career than to most Roman worthies. As the 'son' of Julius Caesar, Augustus could claim distant relation to Marius, whose career served as a model for his own. There are striking linguistic parallels to Augustus' narration of his own achievements in his autobiographical *Res Gestae* (*Great Deeds*). Marius here "preserved the Republic, shaken by sedition" (*rem p. turbatam seditionibus... vindicavit*), just as Augustus would later claim "I preserved the Republic for liberty, oppressed by the domination of factions" (*rem publicam a dominatione factionis oppressam in libertatem vindicavi*; *Res Gestae* 1.1). Marius had to restore himself "through armed force", which is exactly how Augustus' 'restoration' of the Republic had proceeded. Marius (like Augustus) did not start the obliquely mentioned civil war, but he certainly finished it.

The whole work is structured around the Republican offices that Marius held, similar to traditional funerary inscriptions. But Marius' career stood well outside the bounds of Roman custom. His seven consulships were unprecedented and technically illegal (that is, until Augustus, consul thirteen times). The inscription's structure suggests that the Republic is sanctioning Marius' actions, even as those actions undermine its very constitution.

Augustus' pride may also explain the last sentence, the most curious part of the inscription. It refers to a incident in which Marius entered the senate house on January 1st, 104 BC, dressed in the purple robes and 'patrician' boots of a triumphator (Livy, *Periochae* 67; Plutarch, *Marius* 12). This mix of military garb and civilian setting proved deeply offensive, and Marius was obliged to change into a toga. Why include this petulant act at the end of a laudatory inscription? Parallelism with Augustus' honors must explain its inclusion. Augustus was permitted by the senate to wear triumphal garb into the senate house on the first day of every year. In recalling the incident concerning Marius' triumphal garb and

patrician boots, Augustus sought to remind viewers of his own unique honors, while providing himself with the cover of Republican precedent.

### Plutarch's *Life of Marius*

Plutarch composed his *Life of Marius* early in the second century AD, part of a series of parallel Greek and Roman lives aimed at educated Greek subjects of the Roman Empire. His readers understood the realities of Roman imperial power without necessarily knowing the details of Roman history and culture. A Greek patriot, Plutarch emphasized that Greek virtues matched Roman glories while Roman vices mirrored Greek failures. Marius was paired with Pyrrhus of Epiros (see AW II.2). The combination suggested bloody tactical brilliance culminating in ultimate failure.

Plutarch wrote two centuries removed from competitive struggles of Marius' glory-hungry contemporaries. Unlike Augustus (who was already as far removed from Marius as we are today from Kaiser Wilhelm), Plutarch was so distant so as to not have known anybody who had known Marius. Like us, Plutarch was piecing together a story from narratives divorced from the urgency of their contexts. While our aim is historical, Plutarch's was philosophical. What sort of man was Marius? How did he live? How does Fortune treat such an individual? What was his end?

"He was by nature a very virile type, a man born for war, whose whole training had been in the army rather than civilian life; and when he had power he proved to have no self-control [...] (otherwise) he would not have crowned his career, filled with such splendid accomplishments both in war and peace, with so ugly a conclusion, and would not have been shipwrecked by his passions, his ill-timed ambition, and his insatiable greed, which drove him to a blood-thirsty and savage old-age."

Plutarch, *Life of Marius* 2.3

Plutarch drew heavily on the now lost memoirs of Marius' contemporaries, echoing their negative vision of Marius.



Despite Plutarch's focus on character and the vicissitudes of fortune, he also supplies military narratives from all points of Marius' career. We learn, for example, of his deployment of a rear guard of three-thousand legionaries who lay hidden as the Teutones marched past, and then assailed their rear once battle was joined at Aquae Sextiae. Yet Plutarch is ultimately deeply biased by his anti-Marian sources. He presents Marius as a consistently rash if lucky leader, who at one point is brazenly unconcerned when his soldiers lack access to drinking water. In contrast, Lutatius Catulus' retreat before the invading Cimbri is presented as the militarily correct decision taken by a general for whom military glory was less important than tactical prudence.

Plutarch's depiction of the showdown at Vercellae is taken directly from Sulla: Marius, believing that the battle and the glory would be won on the wings, splits his own consular army on the flanks, and places Catulus' forces in the center. According to Sulla (via Plutarch), Marius spent the battle riding around lost in a dust cloud in vain pursuit of the enemy, while Catulus' troops bore the brunt of the fighting. At this point, Plutarch's battle narrative degenerates into nothing more than a re-hash of Sulla and Catulus' bitter anti-Marian polemics. Catulus even claimed that he ordered his troops to inscribe his name on their *pila*, and that most enemy bodies were subsequently transfixed by missiles marked "Catulus." Plutarch the humanist also indulges in the pathos of Germanic women committing suicide after the battle, gruesomely if implausibly hanging themselves with their own children noosed around their ankles.

Plutarch's depiction of Vercellae can still be cherry-picked for useful military information. We learn, for example, of Roman troop strength (32,000 under Marius, 20,300 under Catulus), the equipment of the Cimbri (javelins with butt spikes, white shields, breast-plates and long-swords) and practice of elite warriors tethering themselves together with chains, presumably to prevent any individual warrior from retreating.

### Cicero the Poet

Cicero (consul in 63 BC) was at first glance the very opposite of Marius. Cicero excelled as a lawyer and orator, unlike Marius the taciturn military man. Cicero prided himself as an elitist, while Marius was an unabashed populist. One would think that the staid Cicero would despise Marius, a military adventurer who did not hesitate to mix violence and politics.

Rather, Cicero idolized Marius and composed the epic poem *Marius* about his hero. Cicero's sympathies for Marius lay primarily in the fact that Cicero, like Marius, was born in the small town of Arpinum. Cicero was enormously proud of both his hometown, and hometown hero. Like Marius, Cicero was a *novus homo* ("new man"), a political outsider who obtained the consulship without senatorial forbearers.

The fragments of *Marius* that survive reveal that Cicero, whatever his talents as an orator, was at best a mediocre poet. His verse was derided by his contemporaries, and became a clear source of embarrassment in his later years. Julius Caesar also wrote poetry, but it escaped mockery because it did not survive. The loss was no accident. Augustus did everything possible to make sure that no copies were made of Caesar's poetry.

### Conclusion

Augustus' *elogium* and Plutarch's biography are our two surviving sources that narrate the entirety of Marius' career. We have other sources that tell a partial story. Sallust, writing in the 30s BC, wrote a history of the Jugurthan wars detailing Marius' exploits in Numidia and his election to his first consulship in 106 BC. The historian Appian, writing in the 2nd century AD, gives the sordid details of Marius' final civil war with Sulla. Livy's history of this period sadly survived only in a 'Cliffs Notes' vision called *Periochae*.

Marius, who never told his own story in print, ultimately became something of a blank slate. His enemies could heap him with abuse. Augustus could paint him as a hero of the Republic. Plutarch could use him to meditate on greater problems of human nature. In many ways, Marius remains a blank slate to this day. When we speak of the 'Marian legion' and overarching 'Marian military reforms', we refer to concepts that have no specific basis in the historical sources. The Roman legion was indeed changing (the last mention of the tactical deployment of the maniples comes in Sallust for the Jugurthan War), but we have no evidence that Marius was the direct agent. Indeed, the transition

from maniples to cohort seems to have been a gradual process spanning over a century. Marius has been the vehicle in which military historians have sought to explain how the legions of Caesar differ so much from those described by Polybius. The modern historian must therefore be cautious lest, unwittingly, we harness the life of Gaius Marius for our own purposes. ■

Tom Hendrickson and Michael J. Taylor, a regular contributor, are graduate students at U.C. Berkeley.

### Further reading

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- J. Geiger, *The First Hall of Fame*. Leiden 2008.
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# Marius' Mules

## Rome's new mobile infantry

THE REFORMS MADE TO THE ROMAN MILITARY BY THE GENERAL GAIUS MARIUS IN THE LAST YEARS OF THE SECOND CENTURY BC DRAMATICALLY CHANGED THE WAY IN WHICH THE LEGIONS OF ROME WERE RECRUITED, EQUIPPED, ORGANISED AND OPERATED. THE BIGGEST LOGISTICAL TRANSFORMATION TO THE ROMAN ARMY RESULTING FROM MARIUS' REFORMS WAS IN THE SIZE OF THE BAGGAGE TRAIN WHICH ACCOMPANIED A LEGION ON THE MARCH AND TO THE AMOUNT OF EQUIPMENT THAT EACH LEGIONARY WAS SUBSEQUENTLY REQUIRED TO CARRY.

By Christopher A. Matthew



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Plutarch (*Life of Marius* 13) places this reform at the time of Marius' second consulship in 104 BC. As such, this reform was part of a series of interdependent modifications made by Marius to enhance the effectiveness of the legions in preparation for a campaign against 300,000 migrating Germanic tribesmen.

This reform to the portage of equipment, in conjunction with the other reforms, dramatically transformed the manner in which the Roman legions were trained and operated. In 105 BC, after returning from a successful campaign against Jugurtha, king of Numidia in North Africa, Marius took control of the legions which had formerly been commanded by Publius Rutilius Rufus in preparation for the impending campaign against the Germans (Plutarch, *Marius* 13-14). Rufus' troops had been trained in the ways of gladiatorial combat to make them more efficient battlefield soldiers (Valerius Maximus 2.3.2) and Marius may have known when he assumed control of these troops that the style of fighting he would face against the Germans would be vastly different to that which his men had previously faced in North Africa. This suggests that many of Marius' troops from the war in Numidia, significant numbers of which had only been recruited as part of his opening of the legions to volunteers (the 'head count' reform) in 107 BC, may have been disbanded in preference to those troops of Rufus who had undergone a different form of combat training. It

Having set up camp, one of Marius' Mules adjusts his helmet, having unpacked his shield for guard duty. Allowing the *proletarii* to serve in the army, necessarily meant that the Roman state took responsibility for equipping the soldier, and therefore likely brought with it a degree of standardization in equipment.





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Detail of the so-called Ahenobarbus monument, one of the very few sculptures dating to the era of Marius that shows soldiers. The overall scene is usually interpreted as a *Census*, where the property value of each citizen would be assessed and registered for army service. If this is the case, these two men, who are clearly fully equipped, are not among the *proletarii* to whom Marius opened the army as a career. This part of the monument is now on display in the Louvre, Paris.

is also possible that some of Marius' more experienced and senior legionaries from the Numidian campaign had been retrained to better fit into Rufus' legions.

Despite their prior conditioning under Rufus, Plutarch states that the troops enlisted for the German campaign were still in need of further training. As part of the training regime for his legions, Marius' new troops were required to carry an array of equipment (including rations, entrenching tools and cookware), on a forked pole carried over the shoulder as well as bearing their arms and armour. According to Plutarch, Frontinus (*Stratagemata* 4.1.7), and Festus (*On the meaning of words s.v. muli Mariani*), the troops were called 'Marius' Mules' in reference to the amount of equipment that they carried. Plutarch also provides other possible origins for the name. In one version, he suggests that the term referred to any of Marius' sol-

diers who "was a glutton for work and obeyed orders without complaining." In another version, Plutarch suggests that the name referred to an incident from Marius' early career in Spain when he displayed a horse and mule in prime condition during an inspection by Scipio Aemilianus. From this event the term referred to any soldier under Marius' command who was in prime condition. Despite these other appellations, it is with reference to the amount that each soldier was carrying that most ancient historians turn for an explanation of the term.

Some scholars credit Marius with an alteration to the design of the pack that the Roman legionary carried. Some modern works suggest that this alteration resulted in a 'quick-release' system of backpack, which would allow the legionary to quickly remove any encumbering baggage in order to form up for battle. Such scholars commonly cite the historian Frontinus as their source

for this conclusion while other scholars leave their claims unreferenced. However, Frontinus (4.1.7) states that the design alteration implemented by Marius was the adoption of the forked carrying pole as this easily facilitated the removal of that equipment. There is no mention in any of the ancient texts to an alteration to the design of a specific backpack (as the forked pole was not carried on the back but rather sloped over the shoulder) and the comments by modern historians may simply be a matter of mistranslation or interpretation.

The creation of Marius' Mules involved the formal and permanent adoption of a practice which seems to have only been used occasionally by the Roman army in the past. During operations at Numantia in 134 BC (at which Marius was present as a cavalry trooper during his early military career), Publius Scipio reformed the army by making the legionaries carry several days' rations, march in the cold and rain, and ford rivers in full kit (Frontinus 4.1.1; Valerius Maximus 2.7.1; Polyaeus, *Stratagemata* 8.16.2).

When given the command of the Numidian campaign in 109 BC (again, at which Marius was present in a subordinate role), Quintus Caecilius Metellus initiated an exercise program to condition the undisciplined and unfit troops there, which included making them carry heavy loads (Sallust, *Iugurthine War* 45.2; Frontinus 4.1.2; Valerius Maximus 2.7.2). Sallust states that this load was only food and arms and does not describe how much weight the legionaries were carrying or the extent of any other equipment that they may have had. Sallust also does not clarify if the portage of equipment became a common practice during campaigns under Metellus or if it was just part of a short-term program designed to condition his men. However, Sallust does state (91.2) that Marius' troops campaigning in Numidia in 107 BC were personally carrying baggage. This suggests that either Metellus' practice was continued during the prosecution of the Numidian war under Marius, or that the self-portage of equipment was a practice reinstated under Marius' early command in North Africa (which may have been based upon what he



had observed during his time with both Scipio and Metellus).

That the term 'mules' is associated with Marius' later reform suggests that Marius had done more than merely reinstitute an earlier custom (otherwise the term, or something similar, would likely have been attributed to a previous commander). It may be that the loads Marius' later legions bore as a result of the reform were substantially increased from anything that the Roman legionary had carried in the past. By analysing the events facing Marius and his legions in 104 BC the motives behind the permanent adoption of this practice can be determined.

### Why were the 'Mules' created?

When Marius was elected consul in 104 BC, an invasion by the Germans was impending but the exact time of their arrival was unknown (Plutarch, 11-15). As noted, Plutarch merely attributes the formation of the mules to part of a rigorous training program for the new legions that Marius had commanded from Rufus. However, with the threat of an imminent Germanic invasion of Roman territory looming just over the horizon, Marius would have needed to reform the procedures of the army in order to both quickly train the raw recruits and increase their level of fitness for the campaign ahead (following the practices he had earlier witnessed under both Scipio and Metellus). More importantly, Marius needed an army that could advance swiftly north should the German tribes arrive in Roman territory earlier than anticipated. The formation of the Mules satisfied both of these criteria.

Like Scipio and Metellus before him, the portage of equipment under Marius became an integral part of the training and conditioning for those troops that Marius commanded in 104 BC. Accounts in the ancient sources suggest that Marius often employed training methods that both benefited his men (in terms of increasing their physical fitness and acclimating them to the hardships of campaigning) and aided the objectives of the campaign itself. One of the best examples of this style of exercise (other than the creation of the Mules) is the use of his troops in the

construction of the Fossa Mariana, a canal at the mouth of the Rhône in 102 BC. This project both conditioned his men and opened an easier supply route (Plutarch, *Marius* 15; Strabo, *Geography* 4.1.8; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 3.33). Plutarch (*Marius* 26) states that Marius' troops were so conditioned by the time of their encounter with the Germanic Cimbri at Vercellae in 101 BC that they hardly broke a sweat even when fighting under a midday sun. Although an obvious exaggeration, a high level of physical fitness would have been a direct result of exercises such as the digging of the Fossa Mariana and the portage of the heavy loads the soldiers were carrying. An increase in the physical fitness of the men would have had little direct impact on the operational procedures of the legions, but this was not the only benefit of Marius' reform.

The formation of the Mules did not remove the cumbersome baggage train from a Roman column entirely. However, what this reform did accomplish was that it greatly reduced its size. The smallest unit in the legion was the *contubernium* (literally "tent mates"). This was a group of six to ten men, depending on the size of the legion, which constituted one tenth of a century. Each *contubernium* in a Marian legion was assigned one pack-animal to carry their tent and heavy equipment. This means that each century (ten *contubernia*) in a Marian legion possessed ten pack animals, each cohort (six centuries) had sixty animals, and each legion (ten cohorts) would have contained at least six hundred pack-animals just for the portage of the tents and heavy equipment alone. Officers would have most likely had an animal each for their own personal equipment, siege equipment and artillery would require extra animals (and wagons in some cases for the larger items), and yet more animals and wagons would be needed for the vast amount of additional items (food, weapons, money and records) which a legion took with it on the march. If it is assumed that each legion also contained extra pack animals for use as replacements (in the event of loss through disease, accident or theft) each post-reform legion would still have had over one thousand beasts of burden in

its column.

If the baggage train was positioned behind its respective legion when a multi-legion army was on the march, this would create a spacing of approximately four kilometres between each legion in the marching order. Should the lead elements of the column come into unexpected contact with the enemy, approximately forty-five minutes would be required for the second legion in the column to cover the distance occupied by the baggage train in front of it and advance to support the first legion (and this assumes that the second legion could simply march around the baggage train). While the creation of the Mules did not remove the cumbersome baggage train from the Roman column all together, the reduction of its size did have a profound impact on the way that the combat elements of the legion were able to advance and deploy. This, in turn, created a significant number of strategic and tactical advantages that Marius and later commanders would utilise and which would change the nature of Roman warfare forever.

### Operational flexibility

Both strategically and tactically, the creation of the Mules allowed the combat sections of the legion to operate independently from the main body of the column for up to three days at a time (much like modern soldiers on patrol). The brief accounts of Marius' campaign against the Germans provide few details of this benefit. However, such operational advantages can be found in use a generation later in Caesar's accounts of his war in Gaul and his civil war against Pompey. These works contain many accounts of legions being marched *en masse* to a fortified position or town from which the combat units of the legion advanced on punitive expeditions while being resupplied from the base (for examples, see: *Gallia* 2.5, 3.24, 5.47, 6.5, 7.10, 7.34, 8.1; *Civil War*, 1.14-25, 3.75).

When troops carrying their own equipment and at least three day's rations were separated from the baggage train, the Mules allowed for Roman warfare to be conducted at a pace dictated largely by the commander. This is best illustrated by Caesar's



encounter with the Nervii at the Sabis River in Gaul in 57 BC (*Gallia* 2.17-28). Upon receiving reports from his scouts that the Gauls held a position ahead of his line of march, Caesar left the baggage train for the entire column of eight legions (approximately 8,000 animals) under the protection of the two rearguard legions while the combat elements of the remaining six legions advanced fifteen km to occupy, and fortify, a forward position. This manoeuvre would not have been possible unless his troops were carrying at least their entrenching equipment, defensive stakes, water and probably rations (plus their arms and armour) with them as the Mules had done under Marius. Other examples in Caesar's account (*Gallia* 6.5 and 7.14) demonstrate the use of troops campaigning in 'light marching order', which possibly only involved the self-portage of arms, entrenching equipment and rations without the use of a baggage train at all. The weight that Caesar's troops were carrying is illustrated by several references, including one in which the Gauls intended to attack a Roman column while the legionaries were still encumbered by their equipment (*Gallia* 3.24), and another, which states that prior to some engagements, the legionaries were ordered to 'pile their packs' before forming up for battle (*Gallia* 7.18).

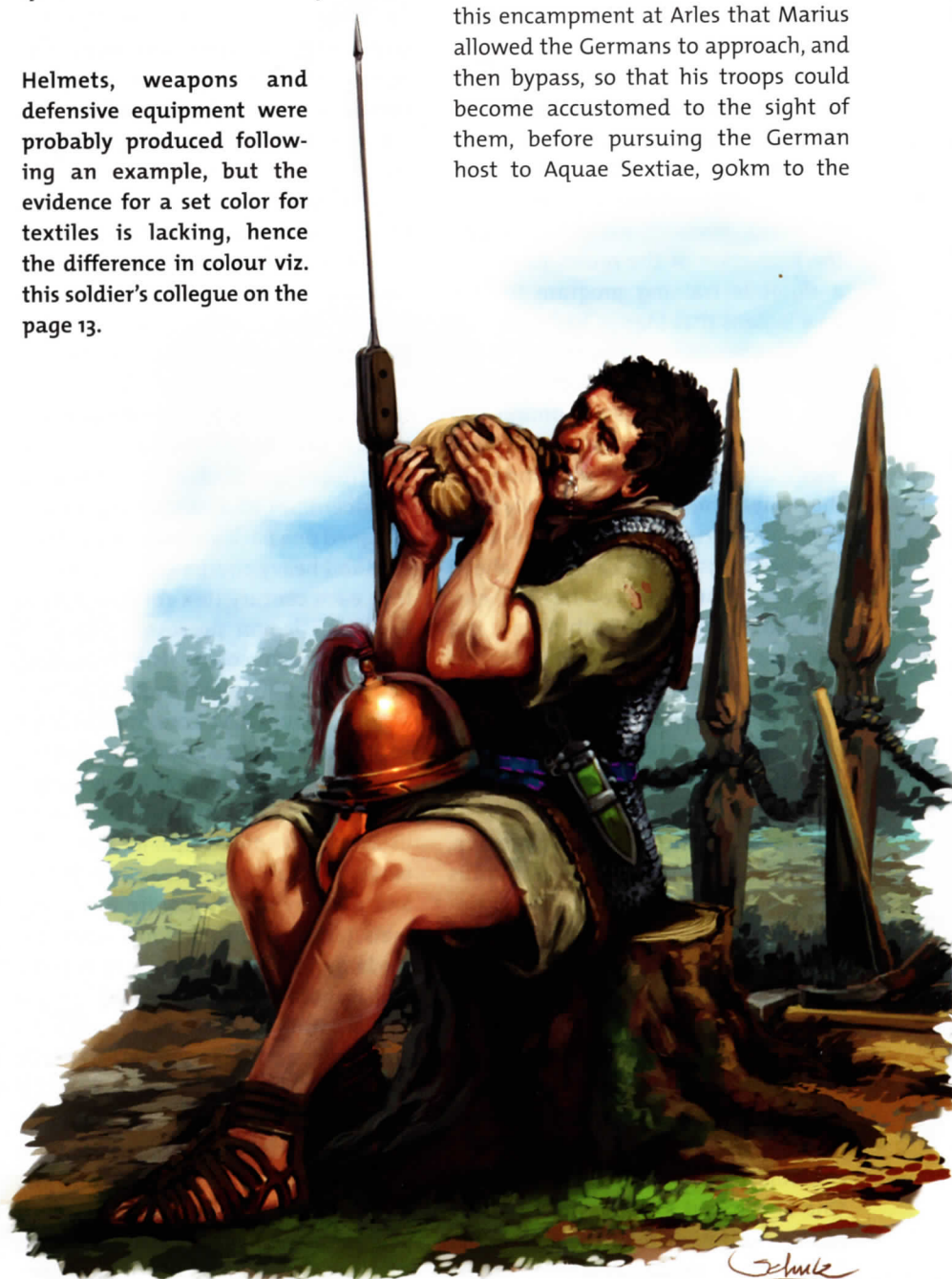
Should an entire marching column be attacked (whether it was one more legions), the reduced size of the baggage train made it easier to protect. The legion(s) would be able to adopt a square formation around the smaller baggage train whilst they repelled an enemy assault from any direction. When Crassus was attacked at Carrhae in 53 BC, the adoption of a square formation not only protected the baggage train, but allowed the legions to advance in a somewhat protected manner (Plutarch, *Crassus* 23). The adoption of the mutually supporting cohort as the legion's basic unit by Marius in 104 BC, and the uniformity of equipment resulting from Marius' opening of the legions to volunteers in 107 BC (which required all of the troops to be armed the same in the new egalitarian Roman military), allowed a legion to present four faces of an open-square forma-

tion. Each face possessed equal armament and numbers of troops and could therefore engage a numerically superior and/or surrounding enemy equally on any front. This was most likely a conscious decision made by Marius when implementing these reforms in 104 BC in light of the overwhelming odds he would face when fighting against the Germans.

Fortunately for Marius, when he was initiating his reforms in 104 BC, the invading German tribes first headed to Spain. This turn of Fortune provided Marius with a two-year reprieve from combat and removed the need for a quick advance northwards by his new

legions. His eventual establishment of a base at Arles near the mouth of the Rhône, and the strengthening of his supply route to this position via the *Fossa Mariana*, suggests that this location was to become Marius' base of operations for campaigning in the region. The selection of such a location created an effective blocking force against any Germans coming out of Spain via the landward route along the coast towards Roman territory. The Mules, like Caesar's later legions in Gaul, would have been able to advance from Arles on expeditions against the Germans while being resupplied from their secure base in the rear. It was this encampment at Arles that Marius allowed the Germans to approach, and then bypass, so that his troops could become accustomed to the sight of them, before pursuing the German host to Aquae Sextiae, 90km to the

**Helmets, weapons and defensive equipment were probably produced following an example, but the evidence for a set color for textiles is lacking, hence the difference in colour viz. this soldier's colleague on the page 13.**



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northeast, where the first major confrontation between the two forces was fought in late 102 BC (Plutarch, *Marius* 15-18).

### Timing and supply

The removal of the dependence on the baggage train also altered the timing of a legion on the march. Pack animals required approximately six hours of grazing at the end of each day's march and another one hour of grazing in the morning before setting out again. One thousand pack animals consume approximately nine thousand kilograms of fodder per day. The use of supplies sent from operational bases to supplement the grazing of pack animals meant that the legions didn't need to move as sources of grazing fodder for the pack animals diminished or as rations for the troops ran low. If need be, by having the legionaries carry their own equipment and several days rations, combat units could advance while the animals still grazed under the protection of the rear-guard and their handlers (as Caesar did at the Sabis River in 57 BC). If the baggage train was unable to meet the combat units at day's end because of terrain, weather or contact with the enemy, the combat units would still be able to fortify a position and feed themselves as they carried rations and entrenching equipment with them. If the two halves of the army did rejoin each other, the baggage would be instantly protected in a defensive position which had already been set up by the advance units.

However, this reliance on strong avenues of supply sent from rear bases of operation created other logistical problems. Again, the best examples of this aspect of the Roman military come from the accounts of Caesar. During the beginning of the Alesia campaign in 52 BC, Caesar's troops advanced into Gaul so far and so fast that his army found itself cut off from its lines of supply and experienced problems obtaining provisions (*Gallic War* 7.14). The rapid advance of Caesar's troops is directly attributable to legions that were operating without being limited by slow baggage trains – indicating the use of troops operating like Marian Mules. At other times during the campaign, the lack of provisions, and the need to

quickly obtain more, was the motivation for the commencement or abandonment of actions (*Gallic War* 1.23, 1.27, 1.49, 4.29, 4.31, 5.24, 6.29). The reformed legions, while able to detach themselves from the cumbersome baggage train for short periods of time were still dependant upon other means of provision if the baggage train was not available for longer periods.

### Increased rate of march

Another facet of military operation that Marius' reform improved was that the self-portage of equipment by the legionaries increased the rate of march that a legion could employ. During the Numidian campaign of 107 BC, for example, Marius marched a small column of pre-reform infantry from the vicinity of Sicca (modern Le Kef, Tunisia) to Capsa (Gafsa, Tunisia), a distance of approximately 230 km, over nine days – including three 'dusk to dawn' forced night marches (Sallust, *Iugurthine War* 89.4-91.3). Using an average of twelve hours marching time for the three night marches, and using this timeframe as the basis for the remaining six days, this equates to an average pace of just over two kilometres per hour. In comparison, Caesar's actions at the Sabis River equate to a pace of fifteen km in three hours (or five kilometres per hour) for an entire column of eight

legions with accompanying baggage trains. In 52 BC, Caesar marched from Vellaundunum (modern Montargis, France) to Cenabum (Orleans, France), covering the 66 km distance in only two days (*Gallic War* 7.11). If this rapid advance even doubled Caesar's normal practice of marching approximately three hours per day before encamping to six hours, this would still equate to a pace of over five kilometres per hour, more than double that of a pre-reform column.

In the decades following Marius' defeat of the Germans in 101 BC, Rome entered a turbulent period of incessant civil wars. The rapid 'pursuit-engage-withdraw' style of campaigning seen throughout this period, such as Caesar's rapid march on Brundisium in 49 BC, are in stark contrast to the slower paced campaigns of the Second Punic War a century earlier. This can also be directly attributed to the ability to remove the encumbrance of the baggage trains from an advancing column, which allowed the combat elements of the legion to strike swiftly from firm bases of operation.

### Unit bonding

The formation of the Mules would have also bolstered the sense of *esprit de corps* within the legions by promoting self-reliance, self-sufficiency and

### Weight through the ages

The amount of equipment that the Roman legionary carried seems, at first glance, extreme (especially the 27 kg of kit carried by troops in the fourth century AD as mentioned by Vegetius). However, the arms and armour of a Greek hoplite alone weighed 21 kg and it is likely that the extra equipment carried by a Marian Mule weighed more than 6kg. This indicates that the arms and armour of the Roman legionary was actually lighter than that of a Greek hoplite - much of the weight of the hoplite panoply was found in the large hoplite shield (aspis) that weighed between 7-8kg. However, despite the heavier equipment, Greek hoplites still seem to have been able to cover great distances on the march. In 490BC for example, the Athenians managed to march the 42km from Marathon back to Athens in a single day. At the same time, the Spartans, coming to the aid of the Athenians, managed to march the 256km from Sparta to Athens in only 3 days (or a staggering 85km per day!). Another interesting point to remember is that a modern infantryman can carry more than 35kg of equipment (mainly rations, water and ammunition) when going on a three-day patrol. However, the modern soldier carries most of this weight on his shoulders and hips (in backpacks and webbing) rather than having it distributed all over his body in the form of arms and armour as ancient warriors did. It seems that some things have actually become worse for the modern soldier.



self-discipline within both the legion and the individual, resulting in a more effective fighting unit, augmenting the effect of the other reforms. The universal hardships borne by each Mule would have provided a further catalyst for bonding through the sharing of a common ordeal (the portage of heavy loads). These processes were not available to the members of the pre-Marian maniples of the earlier Republic whose short-term period of service and class-ranked structure provided no similar opportunities. Yet again, Marius' reform had benefits to both the physical fitness of the legionaries and the operational effectiveness of the legion.

### Continuity of the Mule

There is clear evidence, other than the increased rate of march noted above, that the procedures initiated by the formation of the Mules were continued as a long-term aspect of the Roman military. Josephus (*The Jewish War* 3.87) describes, in detail, a Roman army of the mid-first century AD on campaign. He confirms the continued usage of pack animals for the portage of siege engines and other heavy items, while the individual legionary bore a panoply of more extensive content (and no doubt heavier), than that carried by Marius' troops.

Four decades after Josephus, troops similarly laden accompanied the emperor Trajan on his invasion of Dacia. The frieze on Trajan's Column clearly depicts Roman legionaries in full marching order carrying the forked pole of the Marian reform over their shoulder. From this pole hang several items of personal equipment. The account of the Dacian campaign as told by the frieze suggests that the troops under Trajan's command advanced in this manner to bases on the Danube or in Dacia, from which they proceeded on expeditions further into Dacian territory – much in the same way as Caesar's legions had operated in Gaul decades earlier. The relief also shows troops under the principate in what may be extremely 'light order' with their shields and helmets being borne by their pack animals (which may possibly be the 'light marching order' referred to by Caesar). However, it seems unlikely that this would have been the case when



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**In so far as there is a material record for this era, the simple Montefortino-type helmet dominates helmet styles. This one is broadly dated to 100 BC – AD 30 and is now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK.**

in close proximity to the enemy (certainly there is no depiction of troops in 'light order' on Trajan's column when the enemy is nearby). The troops must have adopted the portage of their own equipment when approaching enemy held territory.

The use of fast and mobile infantry also continued to be a common practice well into the late Roman Empire. By the fourth century AD, Roman legionaries carried approximately 27 kilograms of equipment plus their arms and armour. This was, according to Vegetius (1.19), to keep the soldiers in peak physical condition and accustom them to bearing heavy burdens – the same objectives and practices employed intermittently by Scipio and Metellus, and then permanently by Marius. Vegetius details the 'full step' pace of a legion as 35 km in five hours (seven kilometres per hour). It has been argued that Vegetius' rate is for troops moving along roads and not over open ground or through hostile territory. However such a rate of march is still a vast increase over that of legions prior to Marius' reform.

According to Ammianus Marcellinus (16.12.1-68), at the battle of Strasbourg in AD357, the Romans were able to march 34 kilometers, stop, dig a moat and rampart for their camp, place defensive stakes, pitch tents, go on parade and still have enough time to march out and fight a major battle against a massive army of Germanic warriors. Marius' reform had created the precedent for a legion that was faster, smaller and more mobile. Combat elements of the legion could also utilise roads and routes which were normally inaccessible to columns using large numbers of carts

or drawn wagons. The accounts of writers like Vegetius and Ammianus demonstrate that the principles behind the Marian reforms remained an aspect of Roman military procedures for centuries after their initial implementation and that the strategic and tactical benefits of the reforms were maintained as fundamental characteristics of Roman warfare.

The formation of 'Marius' Mules' was one of the greatest logistical advances for the Roman army and significantly affected the manner in which the legions were able to advance, operate and deploy. Initially created out of a need to reform the procedures of the army and to rapidly create a combat effective force that could advance quickly, the benefits of using troops unencumbered by, and independent of, large baggage trains, drastically changed the nature of Roman warfare. The increased mobility of the post-Marian legions allowed later commanders to penetrate into foreign or hostile territories and conquer them from within so long as their supply and communication lines remained strong. The success of Marius' Mules meant that later commanders would continually use this ability as an effective offensive strategy in the Roman military. ■

*Christopher Matthew is a well-respected authority on ancient warfare. The author of numerous books and journal articles on the subject, he teaches ancient history at the Australian Catholic University in Sydney.*

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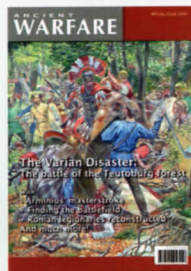
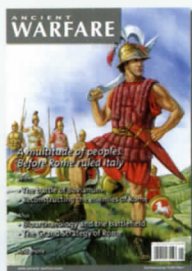
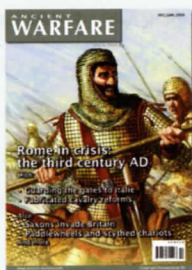
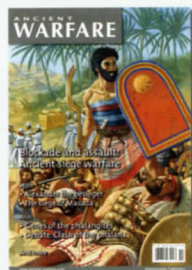
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# Reenacting Marius' *milites*

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE FIRST HALF OF THE FIRST CENTURY BC IS RARE, ESPECIALLY COMPARED TO THE RELATIVE WEALTH OF MATERIAL FROM THE EARLY IMPERIAL ERA. USING A COMBINATION OF SINGLE FINDS, EVIDENCE FROM EARLIER PERIODS SUCH AS NUMANTIA (153-133 BC) AND PICTORIAL EVIDENCE FROM (FOR INSTANCE) THE SO-CALLED ALTAR OF DOMITIUS AHENOBARBUS, WE CAN COME UP WITH THE BEST POSSIBLE RECONSTRUCTION ACCORDING TO THE CURRENT ACADEMIC *STATUS QUO*. FUTURE EXCAVATIONS WILL HOPEFULLY PROVIDE NEW EVIDENCE TO SHARPEN OUR IDEAS.



By Jean-Luc Féraud

The soldier shown here is a veteran of campaign against Jugurtha in North Africa. He is in marching order, having just arrived in southern France in 104 BC. He is one of the 25,000 experienced legionaries who spent five long years in what is today Algeria. These veterans have come to regroup with the 10,000 survivors of the Battle of Arausio (Orange, France) in 105 BC where the Roman legions were defeated by a coalition of Celtic and Germanic tribes. They will set up camp, dig a canal, and train near to what is today Saint-Remy de Provence. The Ambrones will finally be defeated at Aix en Provence

in 102 BC, and the Teutones two days later in Pourrières about 23 km from the first battle (these two victories are collectively known as the Battle of Aquae Sextiae).

The overview to the right lists the soldier's equipment in detail. Above is another view of the soldier in marching kit, and ready for combat. Having dropped his pack and uncovered his shield, he shows how a Roman legionary can easily protect almost his entire body with the tall *scutum*. In that position, he awaits an opportunity to strike out with the *gladius*, which we know from descriptions in Livius, was

as good for thrusting as it was as a slashing, or hacking weapon. ■

*Jean-Luc Féraud is a member of Aera: the European Association of Ancient Reenactment ([www.reconstitution-romaine.com](http://www.reconstitution-romaine.com)), who specialize in Republican Roman reenactment. He would like to extend his thanks, for their help in research and reconstruction, to Ira and Erich König, Peter Connolly for the shield plans, L. Poussel for his studies on Marian history and battlefields and C. Savonitto and J. Jelic for their help, support and research. All photos © Jean-Luc Féraud.*



The heavy *pilum* is of a type found in Slovenia and Spain.

The *furca* is a carrying pole. Attached to it are a bag with personal belongings, a cooking pot and a mesh bag holding rations in the form of grain, sausages and smoked meat. Most of the weight of the *furca* rests on the shield and not the shoulder, making it comfortable to carry.

The *scutum* or shield is made of laminated birch. It is based on a find from El Fayum, Egypt. A rope threaded through nine metal rings on the shield helps carry it: the rope goes over the shoulders like a backpack and then around the waist to keep it tight. The shield has a waterproof leather cover as ancient glue was very sensitive to humidity and needed special protection from the elements.

The *paenula* or cloak is made of raw wool. Lanolin in the fibers made it naturally waterproof. It acted as a cushion for the baggage weight on the shoulders and protected the shield from rubbing on the chainmail shirt.

*Fasciae* or leggings may have been worn, according to some early texts and artworks, though the color is speculative.

In the late republican period, *caligae* began to replace *perones*. The continuous long marches in the 2nd century may explain the change.



A typical Montefortino type bronze helmet from the second half of the 2nd century. It is hammered from a single piece of bronze and worn without crests while marching. Experimentation shows that it is more comfortable to carry on the chest when its cord is passed through the *paenula* opening.

The 2nd century *gladius Hispaniensis* has straight edges, is longer and has a thinner point than later imperial examples.

The belt helps divide up the weight of the *lorica*. The metal plates reproduce examples found at the site of the siege of Numantia in Spain.

This typical republican chainmail was becoming a standard item due to the Marian reforms. Leather borders on the shoulder guards keep the mail in place. Beneath the mail is a padded garment that cushions the mail and acts as extra armor.

A sleeveless *tunica* made of wool is worn over a similar linen undertunic. Fringes were sometimes left on the bottom of tunics when a particular loom with weight was used.



# The rise of a 'new man'

## *Noble rivalry and the career of Gaius Marius*

POLITICS ARE – ALMOST BY DEFINITION – A VICIOUS BUSINESS. WHILE THIS IS TRUE FOR THE TIMES WE LIVE IN, IT IS EVEN TRUER FOR THE CONDITIONS OF LATE REPUBLICAN ROME, WHERE ASPIRING POLITICIANS RUTHLESSLY FURTHERED THEIR OWN CAREER WHILST ATTACKING THEIR OPPONENTS AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY. COMPETITION AND RIVALRY BETWEEN MEMBERS OF THE VARIOUS NOBLE FAMILIES AND POLITICAL FACTIONS, WHO WERE ALL VYING WITH EACH OTHER FOR A FINITE NUMBER OF POLITICAL OFFICES, WAS FIERCE AND COULD EASILY DEGRADE INTO OPEN VIOLENCE. THIS FAMOUSLY HAPPENED DURING THE TRIBUNATES OF THE GRACCHI BROTHERS, FOR EXAMPLE.

*By Sean Hussmann*

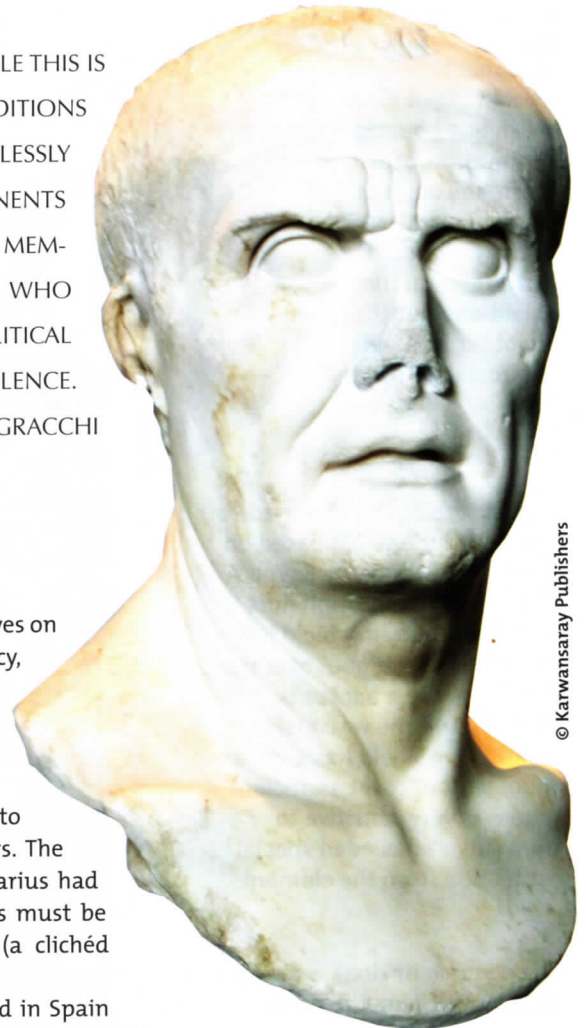
One might imagine that newcomers to the treacherous waters of republican politics had an especially hard time staying afloat, much less achieving any noteworthy success. Gaius Marius however, the *homo novus* ("new man") from Arpinum, would prove (to stick to the metaphor) that he could not only swim with the sharks, but surpass them all in regards to political success, personal *auctoritas* and vicious backstabbing.

### Career beginnings

In his biography of Gaius Marius, Plutarch stresses the man's humble birth and origins. This is most certainly hyperbole. While Marius was not born into the senatorial, but rather the equestrian order, he nevertheless was a member of the local nobility. So while he may not have been as rich as a member of the gens Claudia or Cornelia, he was still rich enough to pursue a political career in Rome. He was elected as a tribune of the plebs for 119 BC and as praetor for 116 BC. After his praetorship, he held a proconsular command in Spain. Spain, being a notoriously unruly province, had much to offer for a military-minded governor. Campaigns against the warlike mountain tribes could earn the successful commander wealth and glory – both valuable assets

for anyone who had set his eyes on the highest Roman magistracy, the consulship. Though Plutarch does not lose many words on Marius' exploits in Spain, we can be certain that he seized the chance to wage war and fill his coffers. The biographer's remark that Marius had neither eloquence nor riches must be regarded as a mere *topos* (a clichéd remark).

Marius possibly remained in Spain until the end of the campaigning season of 113 BC. He might have used his newfound wealth and reputation to campaign for the consulship in one of the following years. If so, he suffered the indignity of being repulsed. This may be the reason why he joined the staff of Quintus Caecilius Metellus, the consul of 109 BC, who had been entrusted with bringing the war against the Numidian prince Jugurtha to an end. Metellus' predecessors in the conflict with Jugurtha had up until that point fared disastrously: Calpurnius Bestia had been bribed into making peace on very mild terms (a fact for which he was tried and exiled when back in Rome) and his successor, Postumius Albinus, had suffered a humiliating defeat at Jugurtha's hands. Metellus was therefore under



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This bust of Marius, the counterpart to the 'Sulla' shown on page 58, resides in the Glyptothek in Munich, Germany.

extreme pressure to bring the war to a fast and successful conclusion. To do so, he needed experienced military commanders as legates on his staff and Marius fit the job description perfectly. For Marius, another successful war meant spoils, military glory, a possible triumph and a reasonable chance to improve his prospects for another try at the consular voting polls. It is clear that from the outset commander and legate had different, even conflicting interests in this war and both Plutarch and Sallust stress the developing rivalry between the two men.



## Conflict with Metellus

Though Metellus waged a successful campaign against Jugurtha, the elusive African prince managed again and again to slip through the Roman's grasp. While the war dragged on and Metellus' popularity in Rome waned, Marius repeatedly asked permission to return to Rome in order to stand for election. Metellus, however, refused each request and on one occasion lost his patience and severely insulted Marius:

*"Do you propose to leave us, noble sir, and set sail for home to campaign for the consulship? Would it not satisfy your ambitions to be a consul with my son?"*

Plutarch, *Life of Marius* 8

As Metellus' son was at that time about twenty years of age, this remark indicated that Metellus wanted Marius to wait another twenty years before letting him campaign for the consular election. It was indeed a grave slight to Marius' *dignitas*.

Marius, however, certainly knew how to return the compliment. Metellus' friend and client, Turpilius Silanus, had been the only Roman survivor after the city of Vaga went over to Jugurtha and slaughtered its Roman garrison. Naturally, this put Silanus under immediate suspicion of having collaborated with the Vagan conspirators. He was eventually tried for treason by Metellus' staff. According to Plutarch, Marius, as a member of the court of inquiry, convinced his fellow officers of Silanus' guilt, thus forcing Metellus to have his unfortunate client executed for treason – a terrible embarrassment for any Roman noble. When it was later discovered that Silanus had indeed been innocent, Marius was in the perfect position to further undermine his commander's standing by proclaiming that Metellus alone bore the responsibility for the execution of his friend.

While the chronology of these two events – Metellus' insulting remark and the trial of Silanus – is uncertain, they nevertheless demonstrate the fierce rivalry that existed between the two men. The overall military situation in

Numidia cannot have profited from the ensuing climate of mistrust, even hate, which poisoned Metellus' personal staff. Sending Marius home, on the other hand, could only have been seen as a sign of weakness and defeat on the commander's part. For the time being, at least, Marius had to remain in Africa. He did not sit idle, though, and used the time to curry favour with the troops by relaxing the discipline in camp. The legionaries, as Plutarch tells us, wrote home to their families in Italy and urged them to elect Marius as consul. They felt that only Marius, who clearly showed concern for the enlisted man, could win the war that Metellus had promised to end. Furthermore, Marius complained to the merchants in Utica about Metellus needlessly dragging on the war and assured them that he himself could bring the war that was so damaging to their businesses to a swift end.

Marius' intrigues finally paid off and Metellus realised that if he kept Marius on his staff any longer, it would only further undermine his authority and political standing, hindering the ongoing campaign against Jugurtha. He therefore caved in and gave Marius permission to return to Rome. Though he had only twelve days to travel from Africa to Rome and present himself as a candidate, Marius made it in time and was elected as one of the two consuls for 107 BC, the voters counting on him to bring victory for Rome in Numidia. The senate however, perhaps deciding to back one of their own instead of a pretentious *homo novus*, decided against making Numidia one of the provinces that would be governed by the new consuls. Instead, the senate passed a motion prolonging Metellus' command.

In order to fulfil his promises and win himself military glory as a successful commander, Marius set a dangerous precedent. He formed an alliance with the tribune of the plebs, Titus Manlius Mancinus and had the command against Jugurtha transferred from Metellus to himself via a *plebiscitum*, a direct vote by the Roman plebs. In hindsight, this political manoeuvre must be seen as nothing less than a constitutional revolution: the practice of politicians effectively choosing their

commands in this way would in later years have disastrously destabilising effects on the Roman republic. At that time however, Marius had planted his foot firmly in the *popularis* camp and had demonstrated his willingness to disregard the senate's authority. That he then proceeded to enlist the Roman *proletarii*, the poor citizens from the lowest census class, who had hitherto been unqualified to serve as Roman soldiers, into the new legions formed in Numidia, certainly did not improve his standing with the *optimates*.

Metellus, understandably, was not amused upon hearing the news from Rome. According to Plutarch,

*"Metellus, no longer able to control his feelings of jealousy, and his indignation that now when he had really finished the war, and nothing was left but to secure the person of Jugurtha, Marius, grown great merely through his ingratitude to him, should come to bereave him both of his victory and triumph, could not bear to have any interview with him; but retired himself, whilst Rutilius, his lieutenant, surrendered up the army to Marius."*

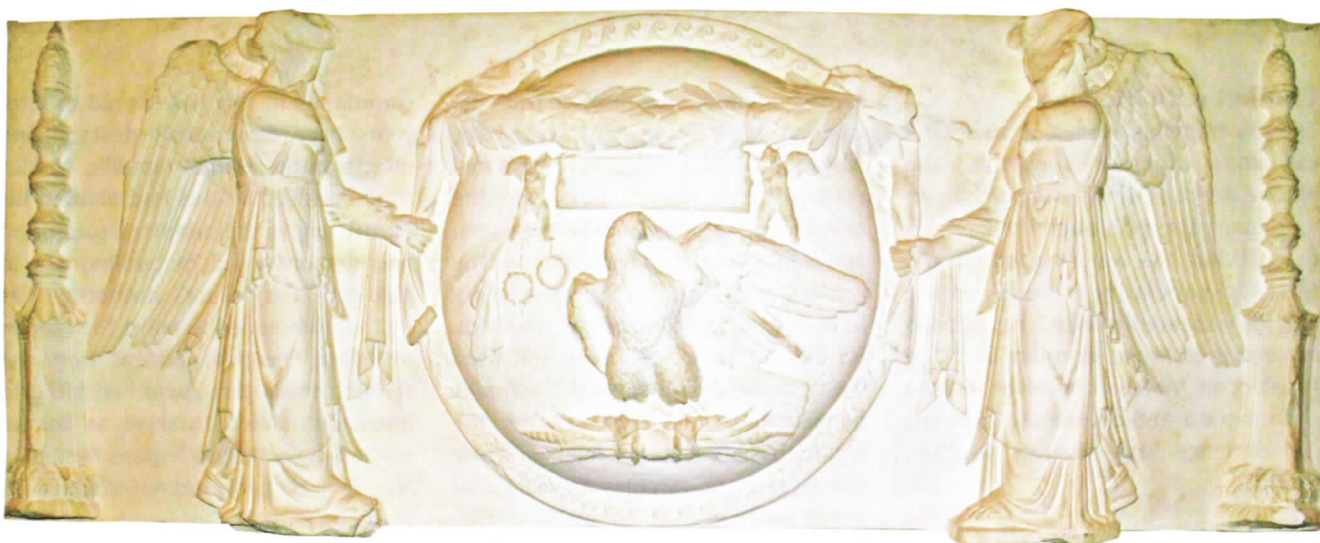
Plutarch, *Life of Marius* 10

## The victorious general

After being thus humiliated by his former subordinate, it must have only been scant consolation that, upon returning to Rome, Metellus nevertheless was awarded the honorary name 'Numidicus' and a triumph. It might have given him some satisfaction, though, to hear that Marius was by no means able to provide the quick and decisive victory he had promised. Marius arrived in Numidia in late 107 BC and although he captured Capsa and defeated Jugurtha in a pitched battle at Cirta, he was unable to capture the king. In the end, it was treachery that brought the war to a conclusion. Jugurtha's father-in-law, King Bocchus of Mauretania, delivered the Numidian prince into the hands of Lucius Cornelius Sulla, who at that time was Marius' subordinate officer and held the office of *quaestor*.

As commanding officer, the victory in Numidia was technically his.





Sulla's equestrian monument commemorating the capture of Jugurtha does not survive, but some of the sculpture lining the base does. This cast, now in the Museum for Casts of Ancient Sculpture, Munich, Germany, shows two Victories flanking a decorated shield with a victorious Roman eagle in the center.

However, Marius' *optimatus* enemies in Rome quickly coined the phrase that the first and hardest blows in the war against Jugurtha were delivered by Metellus, the last and decisive one was delivered by Sulla, who, being from an old patrician family, was considered by the *optimates* in the senate to be their social equal. According to Plutarch, who portrays Marius as being

*"naturally greedy of distinction, and quick to resent any claim to share in his glory"*

Plutarch, Life of Marius 10

This was the origin of the fierce rivalry between Marius and Sulla, which would eventually lead to civil war.

Sulla's political career was of course greatly boosted by his accomplishment and he used any chance he got to remind his peers and voters that it was him, not Marius, who captured Jugurtha. He even had a seal made, which shows Bocchus handing over his son-in-law to Sulla. Much to Marius' chagrin, Sulla used this seal constantly for private and official correspondences. The fact that King Bocchus sponsored the erection of an equestrian statue commemorating the capture of Jugurtha in the Forum Romanum can not have helped to

soothe Marius' envy.

It would still be some years, however, until the rising star of Sulla would eclipse Marius. For now, despite the anti-Marian sentiment among the *optimates*, Marius was still the man of the hour. After all, in 105 BC the Cimbri and Teutones had annihilated two Roman armies. This was mainly due to the fact that the proconsul and commander of one of the armies, Quintus Servilius Caepio, refused to accept commands from the consul Mallius Maximus, who commanded the second army. As Maximus was a *homo novus*, Caepio regarded it as beneath his dignity to subordinate himself to Maximus. Therefore, instead of uniting, the two Roman armies camped a few miles apart from each other, making it easy for the Germans to wipe them

out separately. In the face of this crushing defeat - the worst Rome had experienced since Cannae - Marius was seen as the last hope to avert the anticipated invasion of Italy.

Not surprisingly, he was elected consul again in 105 BC and was immediately given Gaul as his proconsular command. The German invasion however, did not come in 104 BC, making it necessary for Marius to hold another consulship in 103 BC. This was a year in which the Germans again refused to show up near the Roman provinces. Having again failed to bring about a speedy conclusion to the war, his support in Rome was slowly waning. To secure a fourth consulship, Marius required the assistance and oratorical skill of the tribune of the plebs Lucius Appuleius Saturninus. It

### Rome's two 'parties'

There were two major factions in Roman politics: the *optimates* and the *populares*. The *optimates* were usually conservatives, often from old patrician families, who opposed the rise of *homines novi* in Roman politics. While they wished to uphold and extend the power in the senate, they also desired to limit the power of the people's assemblies and the tribunes of the plebs. They were generally opposed to the extension of Roman citizenship and held a strong belief in traditional Roman morals and values. The *populares*, on the other hand, heavily relied on the people's assemblies to further their political career. Many *popularis* politicians were *homines novi* and started their political careers as tribunes of the plebs. The favourite themes of *popularis* policies included the extension of citizenship to communities outside Rome and Italy, the provision of free grain to the Roman populace and the assignment of land grants to veterans who had been recruited from the lowest census class.

Rivalry between these two factions is one of the major characteristics of late republican political history. However, affiliation with one of the two factions was seldom about ideology: Many a politician chose the *popularis* way of climbing the political ladder, only to turn into a staunch *optimatus* in his later years and vice versa.



was during this fourth consulship that the conflict with the Germanic tribes saw its first success on the Roman side. Marius defeated the Teutones in the battle of Aquae Sextiae and – adding political to military triumph – learned after his victory that he had been elected as consul for 101 BC. He then went on to participate in the battle of Vercellae, where Roman arms defeated the Cimbri, thus ending the German threat to peace in Italy. Marius, however, desired a sixth consulship, mainly to be in a position to ensure the settlement of land grants for his veterans. He may also have felt entitled to another consulship as a token of gratitude for his stunning victories. He was, after all, hailed by his followers as the third founder of Rome.

It was for this reason – to further his chances in the coming elections – that he declined the double triumph that was awarded him. Holding two triumphs would have been interpreted as a sign of *superbia* (pride) and could have cost him the support of the Roman plebs. Instead, he wisely chose to share his single triumph with his consular colleague Lutatius Catulus, although

*“the entire success was attributed to Marius because of his previous victory and his superior rank.”*

Plutarch, Life of Marius 27

Again, Marius' political campaign was successful and he held his sixth consulship in 100 BC. It was in this year that his ally Saturninus proposed an agrarian law to supply Marius' veterans with plots of land. This move was violently opposed by the *optimates* in the senate and Saturninus had to force his law into effect with the help of Marius' veterans. To make sure the law was upheld after his term of office, Saturninus made every senator swear an oath to observe it. Only Marius' old adversary, Metellus Numidicus, refused the oath and went into voluntary exile. Alienated by his ally's actions, Marius seriously contemplated breaking his ties with Saturninus, who in turn saw his only chance for political survival in his continuation in office. Saturninus therefore had himself elected into his third tribunate for the year 99 BC. The

elections, however, were overshadowed by violence. One of the candidates for the consulship, one Gaius Memmius, was murdered in the forum by Saturninus' partisans, thus giving the senate the perfect excuse to rid themselves of the *popularis* demagogue. A *senatus consultum ultimum* was passed. This ultimate decree commissioned the magistrates to use any means necessary to restore peace and stability to the republic. This effectively meant that Marius was ordered to defend the state against Saturninus, who had been declared *hostis* (enemy of the state). Marius defeated Saturninus in a pitched battle on the Forum Romanum and, having assured his former ally and his surviving followers that their lives would be spared, had them locked up in the Curia Hostilia, where they were to await trial. That night, however, young members of the *optimates* faction climbed the roof of the Curia, stripped it of its roof tiles and used them to stone the prisoners to death.

Marius had been completely humiliated. Not only had he been forced to turn against one of his closest allies, but by stoning Saturninus, his enemies had made a mockery of Marius' promise that no physical harm should come to the demagogue and his followers until they had faced a fair trial. Deeply embarrassed, Marius retired from public life after his sixth consulship.

After having spent some years as a private citizen, he held a command during the Social War, but due to poor health, he again retired not long into the war. He did make a final return to politics, though. When in 88 BC, Sulla was elected consul and was charged with leading an army against King Mithridates of Pontus, the tribune of the plebs Sulpicius Rufus had the command transferred to Marius by another *plebiscitum*. Sulla, who was at that time preparing his army for the campaign in the east, refused to accept this decision and took violence in Roman politics to a new level by marching his army to Rome and capturing the city, where he had the eastern command transferred back to himself. Marius, who had not foreseen that Sulla would risk civil war in order to keep the lucrative command against

Mithridates, attempted to defend the city by employing gladiators. These were, of course, no match for Sulla's disciplined legionaries. Marius was forced to flee to Africa, where he arrived after a very dramatic and eventful flight.

Sulla did not tarry long in Rome. After securing his command and having the senate pass death sentences on Marius and a handful of his supporters, he quickly set sail for the east. The situation in Rome, though, was still very unstable. While one of the consuls for 87 BC, Gnaeus Octavius, was a staunch *optimatus*, the other, Lucius Cornelius Cinna, was a *popularis* and partisan of Marius. Renewed fighting broke out almost as soon as Sulla had left Italy. Marius, who had raised an army in Africa, was able to return to Rome, where he had his soldiers execute the leading supporters of Sulla, including Octavius, whose severed heads were then exhibited in the Forum. Under threat of violence, the eastern command was once more transferred to Marius; Sulla was declared an enemy of the state and Marius was made consul for the seventh time. His health, however, was quickly failing and barely two weeks after he assumed office, Marius died of pneumonia on January 13th, 86 BC.

After Sulla returned from his successful campaign against Mithridates and defeated the pro-Marian regime in a bloody civil war, he had Marius' body exhumed and thrown into the Tiber river, as was usually done with enemies of the state – an ignoble end for a man who, having held seven consulships, had achieved what no politician before him had ever dreamt of achieving. ■

*Sean Hussmann is currently working on his PhD at Bonn University, focussing on military history.*

### Further reading

- R. Evans, *Gaius Marius. A political biography*. 1994.
- Th. Carney, *A biography of C. Marius*. 1960.
- E. Badian, *From the Gracchi to Sulla*. 1962.



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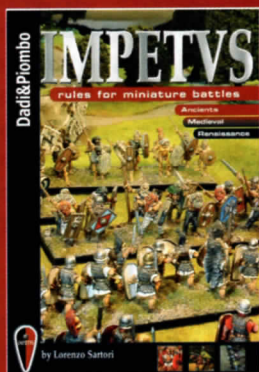


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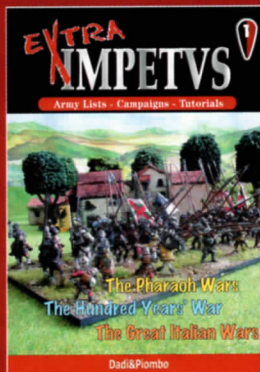
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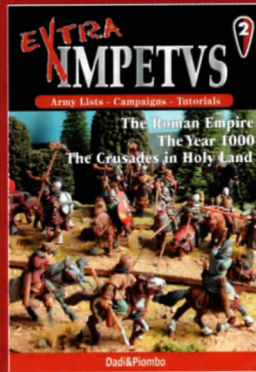
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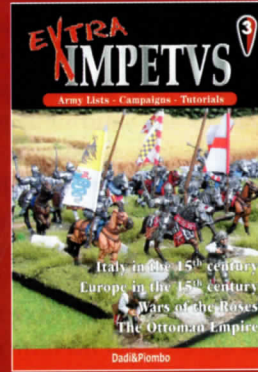
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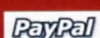
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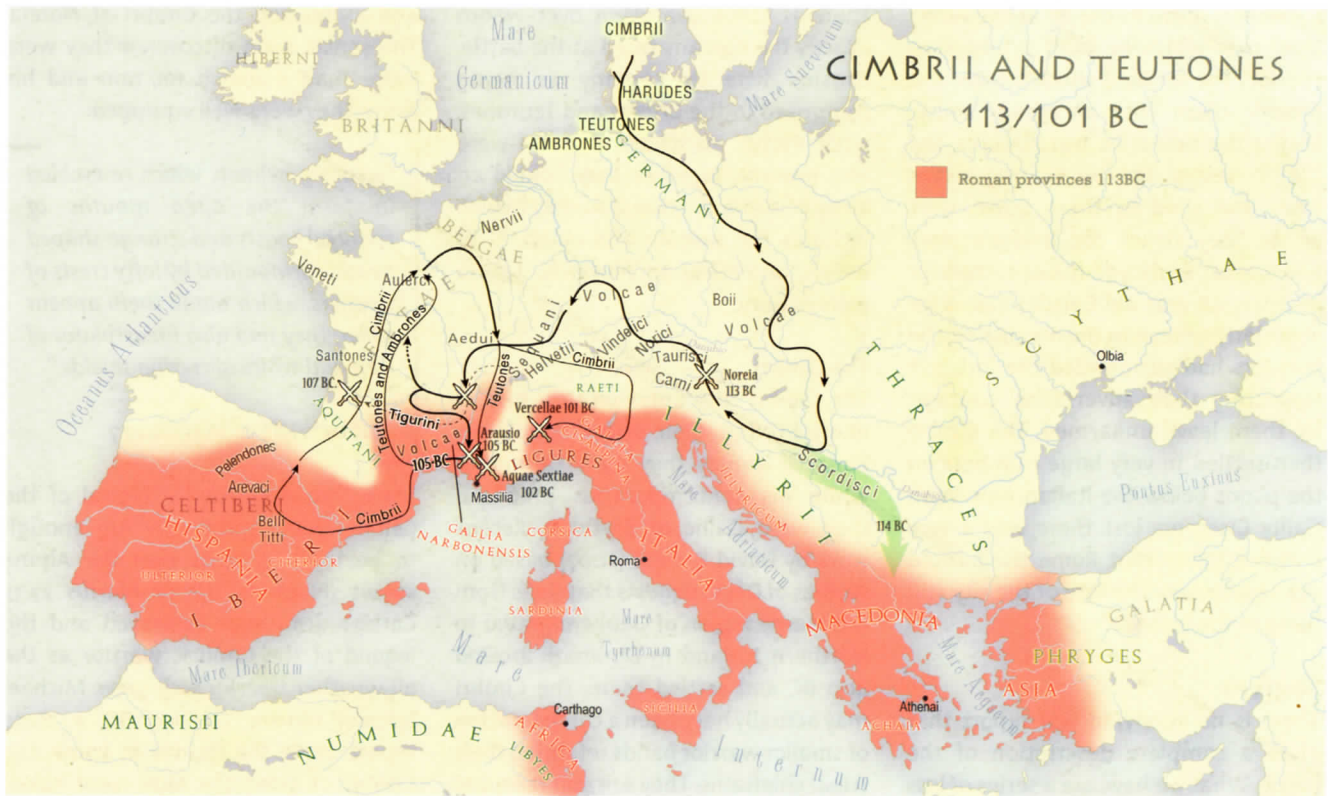


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# The last clash of the Cimbri and Romans

## *The Battle of Vercellae, 101 BC*



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HAVING ESTABLISHED AT THE BATTLE OF AQUE SEXTIAE IN 102 BC THAT THE MUCH-FEARED GERMANO-CELTIC TEUTONES AND AMBRONES COULD ACTUALLY BE DEFEATED, ROMAN CONSUL GAIUS MARIUS PREPARED THE FOLLOWING YEAR FOR A FINAL SHOWDOWN WITH THEIR ALLIANCE PARTNERS, THE CIMBRI.

*By Lindsay Powell*

With the majestic Alps shimmering on the horizon and the sun behind him, Marius, consul of Rome for the 5th time, surveyed the open plain of the battlefield. As far as his eyes could see the forces of the barbarous army of the north were hurriedly assembling. His plan was already working, he thought. He had the measure of these invaders, having beaten a large contingent of them and their allies the previous year. He was quietly confident he could repeat

the victory on this high-summer day. Yet he also knew it was not a certainty, for the Roman force was outnumbered more than three-to-one and to date the northern army had beaten them more times in a straight fight than they had defeated the invaders.

### Background

In 102 BC, Marius successfully engaged an army of Ambrones and Teutones at Aquae Sextiae (Aix-en-Provence) in southern Gaul. It had been a battle of epic proportions, with reported estimates of 200,000 enemies killed and 90,000 captured, against a much smaller number of Roman troops. The victory had been crucial for Roman morale. Marius had broken a debilitating cycle of defeat against the invaders from the north that had lasted for over a decade. Before he assumed overall command, Roman generals sent against them had seriously and consistently underestimated their northern adversary. Roman forces had been wiped out in at least two recorded instances, first at Noreia in 113 and then, on 6 October 105, at a place near

modern Orange, France. There Rome suffered its greatest military defeat – ever.

At Arausio, ranged against Q. Servilius Caepio and Gn. Mallius Maximus with four legions plus auxiliaries, totalling at least 66,000 men, were 300,000 massed Cimbri and their allies the Teutones. Rome's defeat that day was on a par with Cannae and more devastating than Carrhae or Teutoburg, with the loss of 60-80,000 troops (the sources vary widely in their estimates). Legion after legion had been destroyed by the Gallo-Germanic alliance. The need to replace such large numbers of men so quickly put the state under great stress and even threatened to bring it down.

Yet despite Marius' win at Aquae Sextiae, the Cimbri had crossed the Alps in mid-winter over the snow and ice-covered Reschen or Brenner Passes using their shields as sleds to slide down the mountainsides, to the consternation and ridicule of the Romans. The contempt was mutual. The Cimbri continued on, following the course of the Adige River to the



Tridentine heights on the Italian side. The consul of 102, Q. Lutatius Catulus, meanwhile, was sent to block their way. He established a fortified position with a garrison north of the Po at the Adige River over which he built a bridge to support the forward shock troops and provide them with an escape route. Seeing the defensive installations, the Cimbri responded by tearing down trees and sending them down river where they struck the bridge's piers and almost destroyed it. Concerned for his men, 48-year old Catulus called for an orderly retreat. In the meantime, the invaders had surrounded the fort, but respecting their adversaries' courage, let them leave unharmed. The Cimbri then settled in very large numbers on the plains below the Italian Alps. With Gallia Cisalpina lost there was a very real possibility that Rome itself could yet be attacked. The fate of the city still hung in the balance.

### Sources

There is no surviving war report that gives a complete description of the battle. What we have are a series of less than satisfactory versions that each shed some light on the course of events. In his *Life of Marius*, written at the turn of the 1st/2nd century AD, Plutarch provides the best overall of the extant accounts. He apparently drew on the biographies of two of the protagonists, Sulla and Catulus, which should normally make for greater accuracy, except that in this case the two politicians later fell out with Marius. They sought to belittle the consul's contribution, which is reflected in the historian's apparent under-reporting of Marius' role.

All that remains of Book 68 of Livy's monumental history, which would have covered the battle, is a single sentence from the so-called *Periochae*. In his *Epitome of Roman History*, Florus gives a short account of the war and repeats some details, while adding others. Velleius Paterculus mentions the war in his sweeping summary of Roman history. Eutropius, writing in the 4th century and drawing heavily on Livy, mentions the war in Book 5 of his *Brief History from the Founding of the City*. The 5th century historian Paulus Orosius includes events from the battle

in his *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*.

### The northern army

There is some confusion over whom exactly the Romans faced at the battle. Orosius lists the enemy as being comprised of the Cimbri and Teutones, while Florus insists the Tigurini were also present. Together they fielded an army of some 180,000-200,000 (which includes the women and children) of which, according to Plutarch, 15,000 were cavalry.

### The Cimbri

The Cimbri first enter written history in 113 BC, but their origin is obscure. Plutarch argues they were Germanic, while his contemporaries proposed they were Gallic or Scythian. Recent work by David K. Faux (2007) based on studies of DNA suggests that Celts from the Marne region of Gaul emigrated to Northern Jutland in Denmark around 400 BC and settled there. The Cimbri may actually have been a confederation of smaller warrior bands retaining their tribal chieftains. They are still recorded as living in Denmark in the late 1st century AD by Tacitus in his *Germania*, and as having been circumnavigated by Drusus the Elder.

From 120 BC onwards, between 200,000 and 300,000 Cimbri migrated south and wandered around Western Europe apparently in search of a new homeland. The trigger for their move has been speculated, but it is still not agreed upon by modern scholars. The Cimbri eventually arrived at the Alps in the Carinthia region of modern Austria, already occupied by the Norici, and went further southeast to where the Taurisci lived. They settled around the Veneto "where the climate of Italy is most luxurious, their vigour was diminished by the very mildness of the country and the atmosphere" (Florus 1.38.13).

It was the Taurisci nation, who obliged as treaty allies, sent warning of their arrival to Rome. In 113 consul C. Papirius Carbo was dispatched to investigate the potential threat, but rather than first assess the situation, he immediately took up a defensive position. He did not believe the Cimbric ambassadors who arrived bringing

apologies for entering the land of the Taurisci without invitation. Eager for the political capital a victory would bring, Carbo was spoiling for a fight and ambushed the Cimbri at Noreia. The consul soon discovered they were more than a match for him and his army. They were well equipped:

"wearing helmets which resembled in form the open mouths of frightful beasts and strange-shaped heads, surmounted by lofty crests of feathers, which made them appear taller; they had also breastplates of iron and white glittering shields."

Plutarch, *Life of Marius* 25.7

Their "broad shields" – typical of the Celts – were apparently big enough to be used as sleds over the Alpine snows (Plutarch, *Life of Marius* 23.3). Carbo's army was destroyed and the legend of the Cimbric warrior as the all-weather *Übermensch* grew. Michael Speidel notes: "In 102 BC, a scare report made the rounds in Rome: the Cimbri, crossing the Alps, went naked through snow and ice. Ever since then, in Roman eyes, Germanic warriors, like the Celts formerly, stood out for being naked" (Speidel 2003, p. 60). They were an organized fighting force, not a disorganized rabble. They built fortified camps on campaign and used mass formations, such as the four-sided square, in battle.

The Cimbri were led by their war chief and king, Boiorix. Nothing else is known about him, except that with the ending -ix his name is clearly Celtic. He must have been a fine fighter to have reached the pinnacle of a tribal society that highly valued the courage and prowess of the individual in war.

### Teutones

The Teutones are first mentioned in Pytheas' travels to the North Sea. Despite their Germanic name, like the Cimbri, they were actually Celtic. Why they migrated from their homeland in the north is similarly unclear.

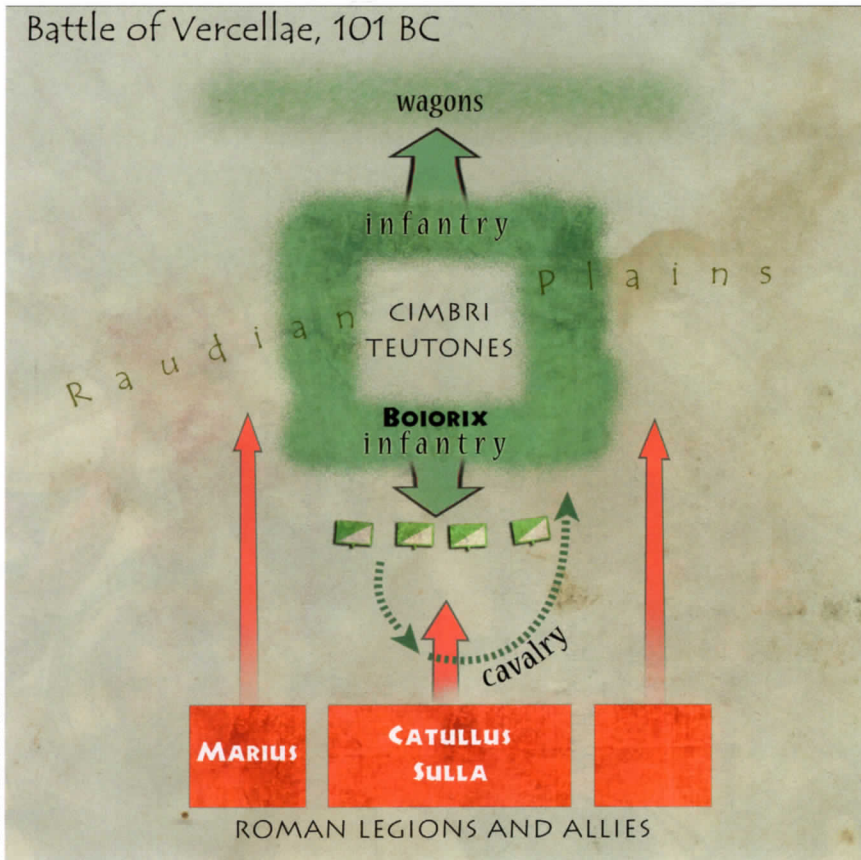
### Tigurini

The Tigurini lived in the region of Helvetia, in modern Switzerland. They were not part of the great migration



## Battle of Vercellae, 101 BC

© Carlos de la Rocha



"Now Boiorix, the king of the Cimbri, with a very few men about him, riding up to the [Roman] camp, challenged Marius to fix a day and place, and to come out and settle the claim to the country by a battle. Marius replied, that the Romans never took advice of their enemies as to fighting; however, he would gratify the Cimbri in this matter, and accordingly they agreed on the third day from the present, and the battlefield was to be the plain of Vercellae, which was suited for the Roman cavalry, and would give the Cimbri full room for their numbers."

Plutarch, Life of Marius 25.2-3

The mention of Vercellae possibly locates the battlefield near modern Vercelli in Piedmont on the Sesia River, a tributary of the Po. Some, however, place the location north of Milan. Velleius Paterculus (2.12.5) calls the site of the battle by the name *Raudii campi* – Raudian Plains – and locates it on "this side of the Alps", that is on the Italian side. Florus (1.38.14) calls the place by the same name and describes it as a "very wide plain".

The place and time decided, the leaders then parted. This interlude gave Marius precisely the time he needed to prepare his strategy. He had won at Aquae Sextiae because of his level-headedness and patience. Unlike his predecessors, Marius picked the terrain for battle with care, and because of his leadership style, enjoyed the respect and unswerving loyalty of his troops.

"The battle took place after the summer solstice," notes Plutarch, "and, according to the Roman reckoning, three days before the new moon of the month now called Augustus, but then Sextilis". (Plutarch, *Marius* 26.4). Early that morning, the Roman commanders issued the order to assemble the troops. Before battle, Marius led his men in the traditional purification rite. As each animal was slain, the priest intoned the words "Father Mars, to thee I make atonement" (Cato the Elder, *On Agriculture* 141.4). The livers were inspected, the omens were read out and meat was offered to the god. When Marius inspected the entrails, he

initially, but appear to have allied themselves with the Celts from the north. By 102/101 the Tigurini appear to have thrown their lot in with the northern alliance and invaded southern Gaul with them, but they seem to have been reluctant to move wholesale into Italy.

### The Roman army

The combined Roman forces were perhaps as few as 60,000. Marius fielded 32,000 men, while Catulus brought 22,300. The Romans formed up with Catulus' men in the centre and Marius' divided into two, placing one group on each flank. The 37-year old L. Cornelius Sulla, who had earlier served under Marius as *tribunus militum*, was now promoted to *legatus legionis* under Catulus. Marius, aged 56, was reportedly keen to bear the brunt of the enemy attack in order to claim the glory for himself and his troops.

It was an understanding of his adversary and mode of fighting, and his confidence in the capabilities of his own forces, that gave Marius the advantage he needed to defeat his foes at Aquae Sextiae. Previous Roman commanders had broken virtually every regulation in the military rulebook: they had picked their places of battle unwisely, not reconnoitred their surroundings and

been too hasty to engage their foes. Equipped similarly to his own troops, and being greater in numbers, Marius knew he had to beat the Cimbri through superior strategy and disciplined execution on the ground.

The one weakness in the Roman military command structure was political. Petty rivalries often festered between generals on the same side, and the battle of 101 was no exception. One-term consul Catulus was jealous of Marius' superior rank and multiple consulships, while Sulla had disdain for Marius as a 'new man' (*novus homo*) who had risen up from the obscurity of a small Italian town to prominence in Rome.

To supplement the ranks of the legions, non-citizen allies from the cities of Italy were recruited and formed their own legions. They seem to have been similarly equipped. The allies were particularly important for providing specialist troops and cavalry, which were referred to as *extraordinarii*.

### The battle

The prelude to the battle was a remarkably civilized affair with a negotiation between the commanders of the two opposing sides. Plutarch records:







The last stand of Boiorix and his noblemen at Vercellae. Most warriors would be fairly simply equipped, but the tribal leadership would have had better equipment, not to mention first pick of the spoils of the great victories at Noreia and Arausio. Hence the presence appearance of (modified) Roman gear behind the white shields which Plutarch mentioned.





washed the blood from his hands and, lifting them skyward, shouted for all his men to hear, "mine is the victory!" (Plutarch, *Marius* 26.2).

Both Orosius and Plutarch mention the fact that "the sun shone full in the face of the Cimbri." Florus confirms that the Romans and their allies faced eastward. Prisoners rounded up after the battle told of how "heaven seemed to be on fire from the glittering of the Roman helmets and the reflection of the sun's rays from them" (Florus, 1.38.15). He also describes the weather that day as "foggy" and "windy".

Despite the prior agreement on time and place, the Celts were not ready that morning. Orosius writes that on the chosen day, the Cimbri were unprepared for battle and fell into disorder when they saw the Roman ranks forming up in the distance. Nevertheless, they took the lead and opened the battle with a cavalry charge, which "advanced in splendid style" (Plutarch, *Marius* 25.7). Orosius portrays this as a direct attack at the Roman centre, whereas Plutarch suggests a feint:

*"On this occasion the enemy's cavalry did not advance straight against the Romans, but deviating to the right they attempted to draw the Romans little by little in that direction, with the view of attacking them when they had got them between themselves and their infantry, which was on the left."*

Plutarch, Life of Marius 26.1

Catulus' troops fell for the ruse and their discipline broke:

*"The Roman generals perceived the manoeuvre, but they could not stop their soldiers, for there was a cry from someone that the enemy was flying, and immediately the whole army rushed to the pursuit."*

Plutarch, Life of Marius 26.1

Behind the cavalry, the heavily armed Cimbric infantry "marched slowly from their fortified posts in a square, each side of which was thirty *stadia*" (Plutarch, *Marius* 25.6), a distance of 5,550 metres (18,750 feet). In this tight

formation "the barbarian infantry advanced like a huge sea in motion". (Plutarch, *Marius* 26.2). Once in range of the Roman lines,

*"Their practice was to discharge two darts, and then closing with the enemy, to use their large heavy swords."*

Plutarch, Life of Marius 25.7

It was a remarkably similar combat doctrine to the Romans' own.

Marius was prepared, however. Florus says he executed the same plan Hannibal Barca had employed at Cannae. In 216, the Romans attacked the Carthaginians directly at their centre, but anticipating the manoeuvre, Hannibal had deployed his flanking infantry and cavalry with instructions to envelop their foe. With his own troops holding the flanks, Marius hoped to similarly encircle the Cimbri. It would have worked had an unexpected distraction not arisen:

*"An immense cloud of dust being raised, as was natural, and having covered the two armies, it happened that Marius, rushing to the pursuit with his men after him, missed the enemy, and being carried beyond their line, was for some time in the plain without knowing where he was; but it happened that the barbarians closed with Catulus, and the struggle was with him and his soldiers chiefly, among whom Sulla says that he himself fought."*

Plutarch, Life of Marius 26.3

Some interpret this stress on the fog or dust cloud in Plutarch's telling of the story to be part of Sulla's or Catulus' attempt to belittle Marius, who is unflatteringly depicted as lost and looking for the fight. Yet, it turned to his advantage: "The dust also which covered their enemies helped to encourage the Romans; for they did not see their number at a distance, but running forward they engaged severally man to man with the enemy, without having been alarmed by the sight of them." (Plutarch, *Marius* 26.5)

The wind died down. The sun eventually burned off the fog. The Cimbri "were unnerved with the heat," writes Plutarch, "which made them sweat violently and breathe hard, and put their shields before their faces" (Plutarch, *Marius* 26.4). This seems more a Roman stereotype of barbarians from the cold, damp north than actual reporting of fact. In contrast,

*"so well were the bodies of the Romans inured to toil and exertion, that not one of them was seen to sweat or pant, though the heat was excessive and they came to the shock of battle running at full speed, as Catulus is said to have reported to the honor of his soldiers."*

Plutarch, Life of Marius 26.5

The Roman counterattack held and the northern troops began to fall back in disarray, hampered by their own measures to enforce discipline in their own ranks:

*"Now the greater part of the enemy and their best soldiers were cut to pieces in their ranks, for in order to prevent the line from being broken the soldiers of the first rank were fastened together by long chains which were passed through their belts."*

Plutarch, Life of Marius 27.1

The Tigurini had yet to enter the fight. In any event, the support the Cimbri hoped would come stayed away:

*"The third body, Tigurini, which, as if for a reserve, had taken post on the Norican heights of the Alps, dispersing in different ways, and betaking themselves to ignoble flight or depredations, at last quite disappeared."*

Florus, Epitome 1.38.18

Without fresh troops to bolster the ranks of the tiring Cimbri, the tide had turned firmly in the Romans' favour.

Orosius mentions that the Cimbric cavalry were driven back into the lines of their own infantry causing



confusion for all. In the melee Boiorix fell "fighting furiously and not without avenging himself" (Florus 1.28.18). They crashed into the lines of wagons parked behind upon which were the families of the combatants, watching the battle unfold before them, and armed with axes and pikes. What followed was a grim massacre:

*"The women standing on the wagons clothed in black massacred the fugitives, some their husbands, and others their brothers and fathers, and then strangling their infants they threw them under the wheels and the feet of the beasts of burden, and killed themselves."*

Plutarch, Life of Marius 27.2

The battle was over and victory claimed by the Romans. The numbers recorded for those killed or captured vary widely. Livy's *Periochae* says "160,000 enemies were killed and 60,000 captured" (68.6). Eutropius says 140,000 were slain and 60,000 were taken prisoner. Orosius specifies 100,000 were slain and 60,000 taken prisoner. Paterculus reports more than 100,000 were taken or slain. Florus says 65,000 were slain compared to "fewer than 300" Romans "during an entire day" (*Epitome*, 1.38.14) – the only figure given for Roman casualties in the extant records.

As was customary, after the battle the victorious Roman troops were allowed to pick over the battlefield and wagon train to take the enemy's valuable booty. Particularly prized were the battle standards. "Thirty-three military standards of the Cimbri were carried off," writes Eutropius (5.2), "two by Marius' army and thirty-one by Catulus". Yet even here there was jealousy between the senior commanders and the regular troops:

*"The military spoils and standards and trumpets, it is said, were carried to the tent of Catulus; and Catulus relied chiefly on this as a proof that the victory was gained by his men. A dispute having arisen among the soldiers, as might be expected, some ambassadors from Parma who were present were chosen to act as arbitrators, and the soldiers of*

*Catulus leading them among the dead bodies of the enemy, pointed out that the barbarians were pierced by their spears, which were recognized by the marks on them, for Catulus had taken care to have his name cut on the shafts."*

Plutarch, Life of Marius 27.4

Winning the battle had been a team effort but the credit for it went to one man:

*"Notwithstanding this, the whole credit was given to Marius, both on account of the previous victory and his superior rank. And what was most of all, the people gave him the title of the third founder of Rome, considering that the danger which he had averted was not less than that of the Gallic invasion, and in their rejoicings with their wives and children at home they coupled Marius with the gods in the religious ceremonies that preceded the banquet and in their libations, and they thought that he alone ought to celebrate both triumphs."*

Plutarch, Life of Marius 27.5

There were protests and a compromise was reached, however reluctantly:

*"Marius, however, did not triumph alone, but Catulus shared the honor, for Marius wished to show that he was not elated by his victories. There was another reason also: he was afraid of the soldiers, who were prepared not to let Marius triumph, if Catulus were deprived of the honor."*

Plutarch, Life of Marius 27.6

Already, the unnerving power of the soldiery in politics was becoming evident.

### The aftermath

The Romans' victory at Vercellae ended any further incursions by northern tribes intent on invading Italy. Marius was awarded a triumph and his consulship was renewed for the sixth time. While many "now admitted that

the state had been rescued by him" (Livy, *Periochae* 68.7), the battle marked a turning point in Marius' career and personal prestige. Recognizing the contribution of the Italian allies, but without first seeking the consent of the senate, Marius granted them citizenship. They would thereafter serve with the Roman legions without discrimination. It might have been the right and just thing to do, but Marius went about it in the wrong way. He had snubbed the senate. It was the first time a general had openly defied the conscript fathers and it set a terrible precedent. The inviolate sanctity of the relationship between senate and people, its consuls and the army, had been irrevocably challenged. Within the next hundred years Roman generals and their troops would march on the city itself and bring down the Republic that the men at the Raudian Plains had fought with their lives to protect. ■

**Lindsay Powell is a regular contributor. He is the author of *Eager for Glory: The Untold Story of Drusus the Elder, Conqueror of Germania*. He is currently writing a new book on *Germanicus*. Visit him at [www.Lindsay-Powell.com](http://www.Lindsay-Powell.com)**

### Further reading

- Barry Cunliffe, *Europe Between the Oceans, 9000 BC to AD 1600*. Yale 2008.
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# The peg that would break

## *Marius and the Pilum: a roman myth*

"AND IT IS SAID THAT IT WAS IN PREPARATION FOR THIS BATTLE THAT MARIUS INTRODUCED AN INNOVATION IN THE STRUCTURE OF THE *PILUM*. UP TO THIS TIME, IT SEEMS, THAT PART OF THE SHAFT WHICH WAS LET INTO THE IRON HEAD WAS FASTENED THERE BY TWO IRON NAILS; BUT NOW, LEAVING ONE OF THESE AS IT WAS, MARIUS REMOVED THE OTHER, AND PUT IN ITS PLACE A WOODEN PIN THAT COULD EASILY BE BROKEN. HIS DESIGN WAS THAT THE JAVELIN, AFTER STRIKING THE ENEMY'S SHIELD, SHOULD NOT STAND STRAIGHT OUT, BUT THAT THE WOODEN PEG SHOULD BREAK, THUS ALLOWING THE SHAFT TO BEND IN THE IRON HEAD AND TRAIL ALONG THE GROUND, BEING HELD FAST BY THE TWIST AT THE POINT OF THE WEAPON." (PLUTARCH, *LIFE OF GAIUS MARIUS* 25)

By Paul McDonnell-Staff

This passage, written two centuries after the fact, along with several others in Roman literature (Polybius, Caesar, Appian and Arrian) are often cited in support of the proposition that the *pilum* was designed to bend on impact. This disabled an enemy's shield and also ensured that the enemy could not throw the weapon back against its user. However, as we shall see, the overall evidence does not support this hypothesis.

The *pilum*, a type of short dual-purpose spear, was designed primarily as a throwing weapon, but could also be used in the hand as a short thrusting spear. The weapon was of Italian origin, and a version of it has been found in tombs in the burial ground of Ostia dell'Osa in Rome itself, from the ninth and eighth centuries BC, which have yielded miniature votive reproductions of such weapons according to Michel Feugere. They also appear in Etruscan tomb paintings, and full size examples from graves dating from the 4th century BC have been found. Socketed types also begin to appear in North Italian Celtic graves from around 375 BC.

Most readers, on picturing a *pilum*, will have in mind the type popular-

ized in Peter Connolly's books from the 1970s and by re-enactors since. These are usually called the Oberaden-type from the original's find-place. In fact, over the almost one thousand years it was in use, there were very many types, and like Roman helmets over the same period, there were many variations. The Oberaden-type was only in service for a short time. Throughout its history, the weapon consisted of a thin iron shank, with a variety of heads, and sometimes just a point, attached in a variety of ways to a wooden shaft. Size varied from the *hasta velitaris*, a small javelin type around 1.25 meters (4 feet) long with a shank 24 centimeters (9.5 inches) long, to the 'full-size' version typically around 2 meters (6 foot 6 inches) long, or longer, and with a shank up to 1 meter (39 inches) in length.

### Shank to shaft

During the *pilum*'s history there were essentially two main types of joint between the wooden haft and iron (really mild steel) shank: a socketed joint – with the wood inserted into the metal – and a tanged version, with the metal inserted into the wood. The latter was divided into broad-tanged,

and narrow, spike-tanged types. It is not possible to cover all the numerous variations on the *pilum*, including the specialist types such as the enigmatic *pila muralia*, or the incendiary versions in this short article, so only those types from around the time of Marius are considered here.

Unfortunately, there are few extant examples of *pila* from between 110-100 BC, but we are lucky to have several hoards and groups containing numerous examples of *pila* from broadly that era. Firstly, there is the metal repository hoard from Grad, near Smihel in Slovenia (at the foot of the Alps, not far from Trieste) dated to around 200-150 BC.

Secondly, a number of *pila* have been found in Spain, notably at Numantia surely related to its several sieges (150-130 BC). Examples straddling this period down to approximately 70 BC, particularly from the Sertorian War (and in fact after that as well), are relatively common.

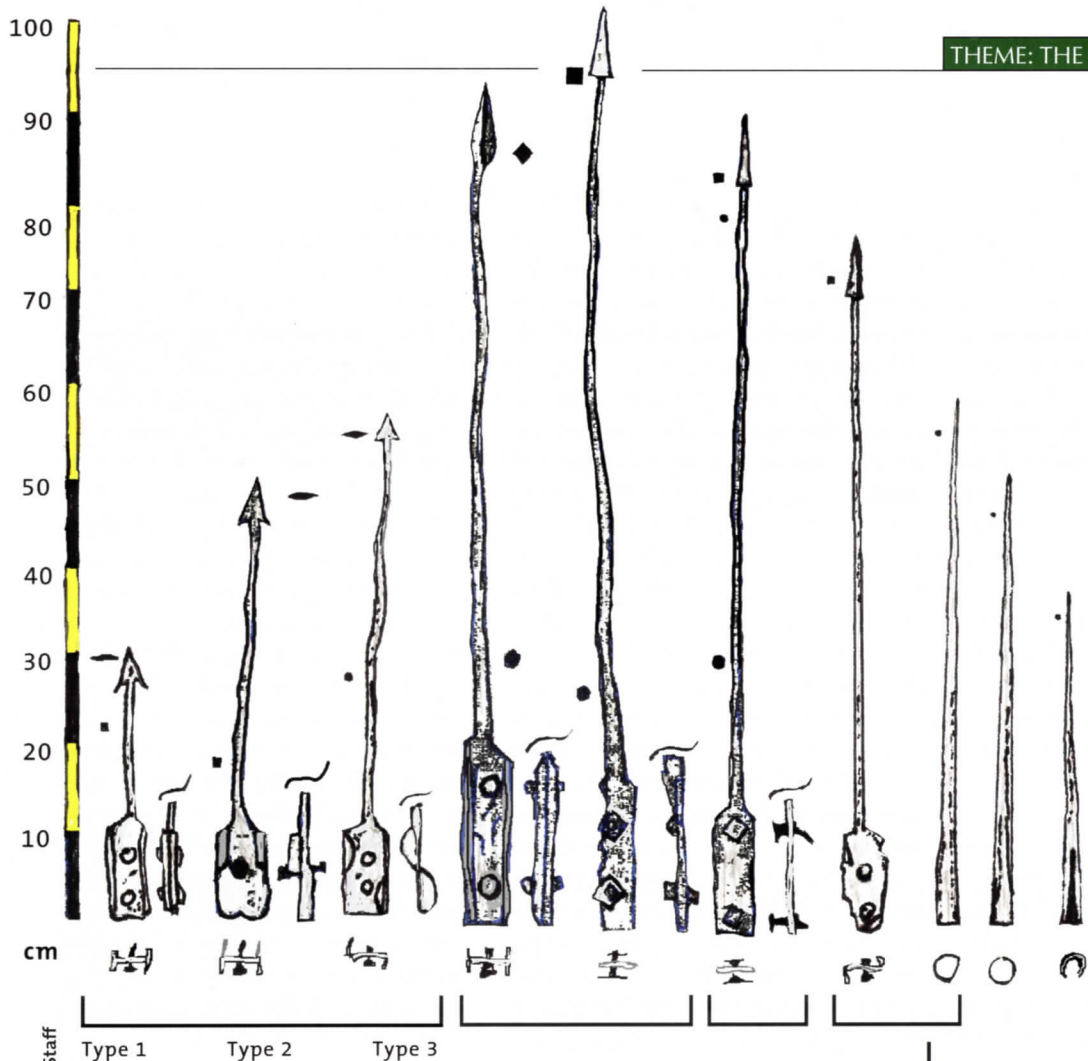
The hoard at Smihel is particularly interesting since it contains the remains of no less than 106 *pila* of five types, and several sub-types.

It is interesting to note that over half of the examples are socketed, tying in with Polybius' description of each man carrying a 'fine' socketed and a 'thick' tanged *pilum* (in fact there is little difference in weight between the two). Though this is probably purely coincidental, it does show that both types were used in numbers. The later Spanish examples demonstrate the continuity in use of these types down into the first century BC. Each type will now be described.

### Socketed Smihel type

These were relatively short, the shanks some 20-38 centimeters (8-15 inches) long, ending in simple pin points. They are relatively thick and un-tapered and certainly would not bend. The seventeen incendiary *pila* were similar, but





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Type 1 Type 2 Type 3

Tanged pila heads from Smihel 200-150 BC; Note the simple one-piece flange, split flanges and semi-circular flanges. Note also that type 2 has only a single rivet. Heads are flat and barbed. Shanks can be square, rectangular or round.

From La Caridad c. 75 - 70 BC. Note the longer shank and pyramid point. The left example is flanged ("H" cross section) while the right hand example has no flange.

From Pompey's siege of Valencia c. 75 BC; no flange

From Numantia c.150-130 BC, also note flange on tanged example.

Socketed "needle point" examples, left to right; Numantia, La Caridad, Smihel

Very similar tanged pila heads have been found at Numantia (153-130 BC), La Caridad and Caminreal in Teruel province, Spain dating from the Sertorian War (around 75-70 BC). These show continuity of the flanged type through the period of Marius. However, the types found at Numantia and Caminreal introduced two new features: a more efficient armour piercing point in the shape of a long thin pyramid and a longer circular shank, slightly tapering - from 70 centimeters (28 inches) up to 90 centimeters (36 inches) long - but still with a rectangular tang fastened with two rivets and retaining the flanges/wings. This elongated type appears to be the weapon Polybius (6.23.10), writing around 140 BC, describes.

Alongside this flanged type, at La

Caridad and Valencia a new type began to appear around the time of Pompey (c.75-70 BC). Apparently for the first time, this similar type had no flanges, merely a flat rectangular tang and was still fastened with two rivets. This represents a 'proto Oberaden-type' but differs by being rectangular-tanged rather than trapezoidal and lacking the fastening collar (evidently introduced as an alternative to the flange to 'lock' the tanged joint).

### Smihel Type 1

These had flat triangular barbed points six centimeters (2.5 inches) long and again were quite short, with the rectangular section un-tapered and the shanks 22-30 centimeters (9-12 inches) long. The tang was rectangular (though a couple were oval), with two rivets. The tang had two flanges or wings which were bent over each side of the wooden joint. Some flanges had semi-circular cut-outs half-way down, giving them an hour-glass shape. This type stretched back to earlier types such

as the Second Punic War types from Castelruf, Gerona, Spain and the earlier Telamon (225 BC) examples.

### Smihel Type 2

These also had smaller triangular barbed points, around four centimeters (1.6 inches) long, with longer square section shanks, 35-40 centimeters (14-16 inches) long. The rectangular tang also had a single rivet, but this time the flanges/wings were split so that they formed four parts which bent in opposite directions on each side.

### Smihel Type 3

The barbed points on this version are smaller still, some only 3-3.6 centimeters (1.2-1.5 inches) long with an un-tapered circular shank 45-57 centimeters (18-23 inches) long. The rectangular tang had two rivets and two semi-circular flanges/wings on each side forming a figure eight shape.

The overall image we have of the pila around the time of Marius is that half were socketed, most with 'pin' type points, while the remainder were rectangular-tanged, fastened with two rivets and had tangs with various types of flanges or 'wings'.

### Testing Plutarch

In the light of these archaeological findings, we shall now examine Plutarch's



statement. Firstly, if we look at the physics of impact, it is apparent that unless there is some (even slight) horizontal deformation of the remaining metal rivet and slight rearward movement of the tang, it is impossible for the wooden rivet to shear. Indeed, unless the rivet then drops out altogether, it will still be impossible for the shaft to pivot around the remaining metal rivet and 'bend' like an elbow. This makes the whole theory inherently unlikely, especially as *pila* strike with all sorts of different forces and impact angles. The final nail in the coffin of Plutarch's anecdote is the presence of the flanges, which are manifestly designed to prevent any lateral movement of the shank in the joint between it and the wooden haft.

This brings us back to the whole idea of a 'soft' iron shaft designed to buckle or bend on impact (think 'crumple zones' on a car to reduce impact forces). Again, the physics tells us that any energy absorbed by buckling or bending will detract from penetration (in order for maximum penetration, the mass and velocity must act down a rigid straight line). Certainly, metallurgical analysis tells us that the Smihel *pila* shanks for example were made of relatively 'soft' steel (not wrought iron), with a low carbon content, around 0.3% ferrite carbon and a Vickers Hardness (VH – see also AW IV.4) of 85 in the core. These *pila* were slightly harder on the edges due to forge-hardening, while the points were harder still, with a VH of up to 135. In some cases, a forge-welded point of 'hard' steel called 'pearlite' (around 0.7% or 0.8% carbon), was also present. This was not because they were designed to buckle, but for ease of manufacture – the 'softer' steel made it possible for a smith to turn out many forged heads in a reasonable time without too much effort. These weapons were not finished with files or polishing, but retained their crude forged finish. After all, they were meant to be 'thrown away'.

Peter Connolly has spent the last fifteen years experimenting with *pila* reconstructions of varying types, using correct 'mild' steel rather than soft iron or wrought iron (which is too brittle), and accurate dimensions, including the fact that the shanks were thicker

than generally supposed (typically 6-9 millimeters just below the head). He concluded that the longest (over one meter) and thinnest shanks would not normally bend on impact, but that the shank would follow the point deeply through a shield to allow the point to be effective against the man behind. He also points out that contrary to popular opinion, the literature does not support the idea of bending or buckling on impact. Polybius (6.22.4) refers only to the javelin-like *hasta velitaris* bending, which Connolly's experiments confirmed, but not the *pila*. Caesar (*Gallic War* 1.25.3) describes *pila* piercing two overlapping shields, and the frantic Gauls bending them in their efforts to free them. Plutarch's late anecdote (*Marius* 25) is disproved both by the physics and the archaeology. Connolly does not mention Arrian's reference (*Against the Alans*, line 17) to a similar instance of Alans being unable to extract *pila* from shields and armour because they bent "because of the softness" (though the wording is not entirely clear). Appian too correctly makes note of the relatively softer shank, but hard point – but does not refer to any bending. "The Gauls used spears not unlike javelins, *pila*, as the Romans call them, four-sided, half of wood and half of iron, which was soft except for the pointed end" (*The Gallic Wars* fragment 1).

Connolly's tests over a number of years also establish the better armour piercing qualities of the 'pyramid' and 'needle' points and also the tapered shank. Once it had penetrated, due to swelling of the wood around the entry point, it was extremely difficult to extract. It is hardly surprising that we hear of bending during desperate attempts to extract them.

## Conclusion

The pilum was designed to penetrate a shield and reach a target beyond. The short original shank, which was quite thick with a barbed head, was primarily a penetrator with a secondary effect of jamming in a shield and being difficult to extract. The needle point of Polybius' finer socketed sort gave maximum penetration at long range when impact velocity would be lower. This was extremely important, for a needle

point was the easiest to extract, but the Romans did not seem to worry about this feature in half their *pila*.

The next concern was ease of manufacture, and so relatively soft 'ferrite' mild steel was used – hard enough not to bend on impact, but soft enough to easily work, with the points forge-hardened and in some cases with harder steel points forge-welded on.

The design of the tang was flanged, so as to strengthen it and avoid breakage or bending at the tang, contradicting Plutarch. It was also not necessary for the weapon to bend or break to impede an enemy shield, and though the flanges were ultimately done away with, this does not appear to have happened until well after Marius' day (c. 75 BC). Shortly afterward, a collar, as per the Oberaden-type, would be affixed to prevent breakage or bending at the tang. The occasional splitting was a flaw inherent in the design: the chisel like tang. This was ultimately solved by the 'spike-tanged' variety, coming into increasing use from Caesar's day.

The development of more efficient armour piercing pyramid heads and thinner, longer shanks (70 centimeters and longer) allowed the weapon to attack a defender even if he held his shield at arm's length. Even these later, thinner types (so as not to be any heavier than earlier varieties) do not bend on impact as a rule, and were certainly not designed to do so.

The 'wooden rivet' described by Plutarch was not only unnecessary, but would be unlikely to work in any event, since it required a certain amount of 'give' in the tang and remaining rivet to allow force for it to shear and then to drop out completely for the described 'elbow' effect. Furthermore, it would have required the flanges to be removed (Plutarch, writing many years later, was probably not even aware of these flanges' existence). Archaeologically, no two-rivet pilum has been recovered with only one rivet present. We may conclude thus that Plutarch's anecdote is extremely unlikely and, probably, a myth. ■

*Paul McDonnell-Staff is a regular contributor*



# A succession of sieges

## *Marius And the war with Jugurtha*



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MARIUS' RISE TO PROMINENCE IN ROME RESTED ON HIS VICTORIES IN AFRICA DURING THE JUGURTHINE WAR. THE ROMAN HISTORIAN LIVY RECORDED THAT, IN 104 BC, AFTER CELEBRATING HIS TRIUMPH, "MARIUS ENTERED THE SENATE IN TRIUMPHAL ROBES, WHICH NO-ONE HAD EVER DONE BEFORE". IN ALL, MARIUS HELD THE CONSULSHIP SEVEN TIMES, AN UNPRECEDENTED FEAT. BUT THE FOUNDATIONS OF HIS SUCCESS HAD BEEN LAID IN AFRICA, DURING A WAR OF SIEGES.

**By Duncan B Campbell**

In his youth, Marius served as a common soldier during the Celtiberian Wars in Spain. His biographer, Plutarch, records that he was present during Scipio Aemilianus' siege of Numantia in 134-133 BC (See 'The siege of Numantia', in *Ancient Warfare* 1.4.). Even then, so the story goes, Marius' qualities of bravery and discipline were obvious to everyone.

The time he spent at Numantia however was more than a chance to hone his martial skills. More importantly, Marius was able to observe a seasoned besieger at work. Scipio Aemilianus was the man who had brought the lengthy siege of Carthage to a successful conclusion in 146 BC by a judicious combination of blockade and assault. At Numantia, others had tried assault, so Scipio relied solely on blockade to

'Jugurtha's Table' is a mesa in western Tunisia which Jugurtha fortified during his war with Rome. His example was subsequently followed by local rebels in the 18th century, and may have been preceded by king Masinissa, Rome's ally at the battle of Zama.

break the spirit of the townsfolk in 133 BC. The most important lesson, that the strategy had to fit the occasion, was surely not lost on the young Marius.

Meanwhile, having returned to Rome to pursue a political career, Marius was finally selected by Quintus Caecilius Metellus (one of the consuls for 109 BC) as a lieutenant in the Jugurthine War. This would be Marius' great opportunity.



### How did the Jugurthine War begin?

King Micipsa of Numidia was a friend of Rome. When he died in 118 BC, he left his north African kingdom to be ruled jointly by his two sons, Hiempsal and Adherbal, and his adopted nephew Jugurtha. However, Jugurtha was ambitious. First he murdered Hiempsal; then he defeated Adherbal in battle. Nevertheless, he agreed to Roman arbitration and duly shared the kingdom with his surviving cousin. But Jugurtha wanted more.

And so, in 112 BC, he besieged Adherbal in his capital city of Cirta (modern Constantine in Algeria). Like Marius, Jugurtha had also witnessed Scipio Aemilianus' siege of Numantia, where he had served with the allied troops, so he knew all about the tactic of *obsidio*, or "blockade".

Like Numantia, Cirta could not be stormed. But Jugurtha persisted for four months, despite the order of a Roman Senatorial commission to cease and desist. When Adherbal finally surrendered the town, Jugurtha treacherously massacred the inhabitants.

An outraged Senate immediately declared war and shipped an army to Africa, but its consular commander, Lucius Calpurnius Bestia, succumbed to bribery and granted Jugurtha an easy surrender in 110 BC. His successor in the command, Spurius Postumius Albinus, irresponsibly delegated authority to his brother Aulus, who suffered defeat and disgrace.

Finally, in 109 BC, the consul Quintus Caecilius Metellus took command. One of his *legati*, or "lieutenants", was the historian Publius Rutilius Rufus. The other was Marius.

*"After Metellus made preparations according to the conditions and the terrain, he encircled the entire town walls with his army, and ordered his lieutenants to take charge of their own sector. Then, on a given signal, a huge roar arose from all sides at once, but did not frighten the Numidians: defiant and resolute, they remained unperturbed as the fighting began. Some of the Romans, each according to his ability, fought from a distance with sling bullets and stones, while others advanced to undermine the wall or to scale it with ladders, in their eagerness to get to grips with the fighting. Against them, the townsfolk rolled down boulders onto the nearest men, and launched stakes and spears, and even burning torches and pitch mixed with sulphur. But not even their timid spirit adequately protected those who stayed at a distance, for they were injured by a good many missiles shot from artillery or by hand; so the brave and the craven were in equal danger, though they were of unequal reputation."*

*Sallust, Jugurthine War 57.2-6.*

### Metellus in Africa

Metellus was a disciplinarian of the old school. On his arrival in Africa, like Scipio at Numantia, he found dispirited soldiers who had sunk into idleness, and was obliged to knock them into shape. The later historian Eutropius records how "he brought the army, which had been ruined by previous generals, back to Roman discipline with great strictness and regulation but without being cruel to anyone" (*Breviarium* 4.27). He knew that sutlers habitually followed Roman armies around, but he forbade them from selling bread or cooked meats to the soldiers. There was even a story (preserved by Frontinus, *Stratagems* 4.1.2) that he restricted his troops to baked or boiled meat, presumably because the men could be trusted to prepare these unassisted, without resorting to the services of the sutlers.

Sadly, the detailed account of the Jugurthine War by Livy, the great historian of the Roman Republic, has been lost, but the summarized version that has come down to us records that "the consul Quintus Caecilius Metellus defeated Jugurtha in two battles and devastated the whole of Numidia" (*Periochae* 65.1). For this, Metellus

subsequently took the sobriquet *Numidicus*, "conqueror of Numidia". In Rome however, the celebrations that greeted the news of Metellus' success were premature, for the wily Jugurtha had one or two tricks still to play.

Livy's ultimate source in writing his account was perhaps the memoir of Rutilius Rufus, who saw the war first hand. That memoir has not survived, but it perhaps formed the basis of another work which has: Sallust's *Jugurthine War*. Unfortunately, Sallust's objective was not to write the kind of carefully chronicled history that Livy favored; nonetheless, the *Jugurthine War* at least preserves details of one or two military actions.

### The siege of Zama

The first of these actions, at the Muthul river, was a resounding Roman success. (Sallust, *Jugurthine War* 46-54, describes the battle and Marius' part in it.) Unfortunately, the Romans had failed to lay hands on Jugurtha, so Metellus hatched a plot to capture the Numidian capital at Zama (present day Siliana in Tunisia), in order to flush the rebel out.

Here, Jugurtha again showed his worth as a general. While Metellus' attention was focussed on assaulting the town, the Numidians secretly attacked the Roman camp, which was only lightly held. Many of the camp guards fought bravely, but Marius was obliged to redeploy troops badly needed in the siege in order to expel the enemy from the camp. On the following day, as Jugurtha again assaulted the camp in a diversionary move, Metellus had to split his forces, leaving fewer men to assault the town walls. By nightfall, the siege had taken a huge toll in casualties, spent missiles and shattered assault ladders, but the town still stood. Metellus reluctantly gave the order to withdraw and led his troops into winter quarters.

However, Jugurtha had begun to foment rebellion in the towns garrisoned by Metellus. Foremost among them was Vaga (present day Béja in Tunisia). Here, the unsuspecting Romans were slaughtered, having



relaxed their guard to enjoy the festivities of a December feast day. (The sole Roman survivor, Titus Turpilius Silanus, was held under suspicion of collaboration and subsequently put to death for treason.)

Metellus cunningly marched up to the town, screened by local Numidian allies and keeping his standards hidden. In this way, the townsfolk were tricked into throwing their gates open, thinking that Jugurtha's forces had arrived. The Romans duly took their revenge by ruthlessly sacking the place.

### The siege of Thala

In the following year, Metellus again bested Jugurtha in battle, winning the second of the successes enumerated by Livy (quoted above; Sallust, *Jugurthine War* 74.1-3, describes the battle). The Numidian rebel briefly flirted with the idea of surrendering, and even handed over 300 hostages as a gesture of good will. Instead though, he withdrew to the town of Thala (present day Talah in Tunisia) to continue his feud with Rome.

Thala was Jugurtha's treasury. Its desert location, 50 miles from the nearest river, encouraged a reputation for impregnability. So, when Metellus suddenly arrived beneath the walls, the townsfolk were amazed. Jugurtha hastily decided to escape under cover of night.

Metellus probably wished to avoid another debacle like the siege of Zama. Consequently, he surrounded the town with a ditch and palisade, delivering a powerful psychological blow to the inhabitants, who watched as their town was gradually hemmed in.

*"At two highly suitable locations, Metellus brought up shelters, piled up a siege embankment, and erected towers on each embankment to protect the siege-works and the workers. The townsfolk hastened their preparations against these. Absolutely nothing was left undone by either side. Finally, after forty days had passed, the Romans, weary from labouring and skirmishing, captured the town; but the booty was destroyed by the townsfolk."*

Sallust, *Jugurthine War* 76.3-5.



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Inevitably ranged warfare played a major role in siege warfare. This relief from Picenum, home town of Pompey the Great, shows slingers from the 'Social War' (91-88 BC).

In fact, at the very moment that Metellus' battering rams breached the walls, the townsfolk set fire to the treasury and threw themselves onto the conflagration. Even then, Jugurtha had already removed much of his treasure, leaving Metellus with slim pickings.

All this time, Marius had perhaps learned valuable lessons from observing Metellus' generalship. At that moment however, he was more concerned with furthering his political career, and decided to return to Rome to stand for the consulship. His strategy (which led Cicero, for one, to condemn him as a traitor) was to court the lower classes by denigrating Metellus' noble lineage and criticizing his conduct of the war. Predictably, Marius was swept into office by the popular vote. As consul for 107 BC, he was granted command in the war against Jugurtha, and Metellus was recalled.

### The siege of Capsa

Despite Marius' slanders of mismanagement in Africa, there was a general feeling that the war was virtually over. Nevertheless, Marius contrived to reinforce his army by enlisting the landless poor and recalling veterans to the standards. Under the circumstances, this was a shrewd move, for Jugurtha had found himself a Moorish ally, King Bocchus of Mauretania, who was willing to provide the rebel with much needed reinforcements.

On his return to Africa, Marius had a new army to train. But, before the end of the year, there was still time to make an attempt on Capsa (present day Gafsa in Tunisia), a town whose inaccessible location mirrored that of Thala and whose capture would equal Metellus' success there. By approaching under cover of darkness, Marius was able to surprise the townsfolk at daybreak and

### Roman Siegecraft during the Republic

Army commanders like Metellus and Marius must have looked up to their older contemporary Scipio Aemilianus as the exemplary besieger. His sieges of Carthage (146 BC) and Numantia (133 BC) were legendary, and perhaps inspired Metellus to attempt something similar at Thala in 108 BC.

Nevertheless, there was a Roman tradition, dating back to the First Punic War, of storming town walls in a display of *virtus* ("manly courage"). It was this sort of assault that came most naturally to Metellus' mind at Zama in 109 BC. On that occasion, unfortunately, other factors conspired to confound his plans.

Marius, too, naturally preferred the storming assault. He took Capsa by a bold *coup de main* (recalling Metellus' capture of Vaga), and repeatedly attempted to approach the walls of the fort on the Muluccha river. It is noteworthy that, in every case, the strategy followed by Metellus and Marius was one of assault (known to the Romans as *oppugnatio*) rather than blockade (the Roman *obsidio*).

Equally, it is only at Thala that we see Metellus deploying the sort of siege train that the Hellenistic generals relied upon, nor was there any great Roman tradition of building siege-works. The real change came only with the innovative generalship of Sulla and his successor, Julius Caesar. These men saw that a properly disciplined army was quite capable of constructing elaborate fieldworks of the sort that culminated in Caesar's circumvallation at Alesia.







seize the gates without any elaborate preparation.

Although the townsfolk surrendered immediately, Marius' army ran amok, killing and burning. If this was a calculated attempt to terrorize the Numidians, it worked: the towns that Marius subsequently approached were abandoned before his army arrived. "A few he took despite Numidian resistance", wrote Sallust, "but more were deserted because of Capsa's wretched fate, and he destroyed them by fire."

### The fort on the Muluccha River

It was probably well into the spring of 106 BC before Marius renewed his pursuit of Jugurtha. He, in the meantime, had transferred his treasure to an impregnable fort on the Muluccha river, his Moorish ally's eastern border. Perched on a rocky hill and approachable only by a single path, the position seemed unassailable.

*"The place was inconvenient for siege embankments and for towers and other machinery. The path to the fort was exceedingly narrow and precipitous on either side. Siege-shelters were deployed there at great risk and to no avail, for when they had advanced only a short distance they were destroyed by fire or by boulders. The soldiers could not take up position in front of the siege-works on account of the steepness of the slope, nor could they work inside the shelters without danger. The bravest were killed or wounded, and the others became more afraid."*

Sallust, *Jugurthine War* 92.7-9.

Several days were lost as each attack was frustrated. Finally, a Ligurian

Protected by a detail of centurions and guided by the soldier who discovered the route, five *cornicines* and *tubicines* clamber up the rocky slope behind the fort on the Muluccha river. When Marius approached the gates, they would blow their horns, making it sound like another army was in the Jugurtha's rear.

### Marius Felix

Marius had a mixed reputation amongst ancient writers. Velleius Paterculus, for example, thought him over-ambitious, noting that "he had the chief command of the war placed in his own hands, although the war had already been practically ended by Metellus, who had twice defeated Jugurtha in battle" (*Roman History* 2.11.2).

Others regarded him as simply lucky. For example, it is said that his consulship was foretold when he, by chance, was sacrificing at Utica (present day Utique in Tunisia). The historian Florus wrote that he "captured Capsa by remarkable good fortune" (*Epitome of Roman History* 1.36). And in his final siege of the fort on the Muluccha river, victory was achieved by a series of chance events surrounding the discovery of the secret route to the hill top.

Of course, in siege warfare, luck often played an important role. Metellus had made elaborate preparations at Zama, but failed nonetheless. Marius made few preparations in any of his sieges, and yet contrived to succeed. Even at the fort on the Muluccha river, with defeat staring him in the face, Marius' luck turned and provided him with a famous victory. In this, he perhaps best embodied the classic Roman besieging mentality, with its emphasis on the glorious assault, rather than the mundane preparation of siege-works and machinery.

soldier brought Marius encouraging news, for it transpired that the fort was not completely impregnable after all. An ascent could be made at the rear of the hill, unseen by the defenders, by scrambling up the rocky, overgrown slope.

Clearly, this was not an option for a full-scale assault, but Marius at once saw his opportunity to create a diversion. He planned to draw the defenders' attention away from his assault troops, who were being picked off daily as they sheltered halfway up the narrow path. The key personnel for such a scheme were the Roman army's trumpeters and horn-blowers, for their horn blasts would seem to signal the approach of a second force from the rear - at least this was Marius' hope. Consequently, he selected five musicians to create a suitable din, and detailed four centurions for their protection on the dangerous assignment; such men, all seasoned veterans, could be relied upon to see the plan through to completion. The Ligurian soldier went as their guide.

The story was so amazing that several Roman writers preserved the details. (Frontinus, *Stratagems* 3.9.3, retells the tale.) The ten pioneers were sent out bare-headed and barefoot, with their shields and weapons strapped to their backs, so that nothing would hinder their progress in the difficult ascent. Presently, a pre-arranged signal announced their successful arrival at the rear of the fort.

With impeccable timing, Marius

led his troops in a final assault under cover of the *testudo* shield-formation, while his missile troops laid down a coordinating barrage. But, after days of failed Roman attacks, Jugurtha's Numidian warriors had grown contemptuous of Marius, and had issued out of the gates to taunt him. Their contempt turned to panic when they heard the horn blasts from the rear of the fort, and the Romans easily rushed forward and seized the gates.

After plundering the place, Marius' army set out on the 600-mile trek back to winter quarters in Cirta. Reinforced by cavalry (brought by a young quaestor named Lucius Cornelius Sulla), the Romans were able to inflict two crushing defeats on Jugurtha and his Moorish allies. (Sallust, *Jugurthine War* 97-99 and 100-102, describes these battles.) As a result, Jugurtha lost the trust of King Bocchus, who finally handed him over to Sulla. The war was over. ■

Duncan B. Campbell is a regular contributor.

### Further reading

For a good discussion of the Jugurthine War, see M. Holroyd, "The Jugurthine War: Was Marius or Metellus the Real Victor?", in: *Journal of Roman Studies* 18 (1928), pp. 1-20. On Roman siege warfare in general, see Duncan B Campbell, *Besieged: Siege Warfare in the Ancient World* (Oxford 2006).



# Skill at arms

## *Professionalism in the army of Alexander the Great*

"NO TOOLS WILL MAKE A MAN A SKILLED WORKMAN, OR MASTER OF DEFENCE, NOR BE OF ANY USE TO HIM WHO HAS NOT LEARNED HOW TO HANDLE THEM, AND HAS NEVER BESTOWED ANY ATTENTION UPON THEM. HOW THEN WILL HE WHO TAKES UP A SHIELD OR OTHER IMPLEMENT OF WAR BECOME A GOOD FIGHTER ALL IN A DAY, WHETHER WITH HEAVY-ARMED OR ANY OTHER KIND OF TROOPS?" - ATTRIBUTED TO SOKRATES IN PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*.

By Michael Schmitz



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Grave finds of a Macedonian warrior dated to the second half of the fifth century BC. The Chalcidian helmet, iron spearhead, bronze strigil and glass *aryballos* (perfume flask) suggest a fairly well to do man. Whether he fought on foot or from the back of a horse is impossible to tell however. Now in the British Museum, London, UK.

Alexander the Great's forces were a good example of the above ideal. After Philip's reforms, the Macedonian army had become a truly professional force; by the time Alexander inherited them they were also highly experienced in the art of making war. Alexander's army can best be described as a diverse force containing almost every category of troop that was available at the time, from peltast to heavy infantry and from light reconnaissance cavalry to heavy cavalry. The diverse nature of this force combined with its experience and training ensured that it was able to achieve victory under many varied conditions and against all manner of

opponents, ranging from Greek hoplites to Persian cavalry, scythed chariots and elephants.

Little is known about the Macedonian army, particularly the infantry, prior to 359 BC. What is known is that Macedon was a country of horsemen and the cavalry was most certainly the dominant arm of the Macedonian forces. Conversely, the infantry, with the exception of the Hypaspists, were little more than peasant levies with little or no real combat value. Thucydides depicts the lack of confidence the Macedonians placed in their own infantry when in 429/8 BC, faced with imminent contact with the enemy, the Macedonians felt obliged to call on more of their cavalry rather than use the (apparently) less effective infantry. It is evident that Archelaus (r. 413 to 399 BC), set about trying to bring the Macedonian infantry in line with contemporary Greek armies both in training and equipment. Alexander II (r. 370-368 BC) seemingly took these improvements one step further and brought the social and military status of the Macedonian infantry in line with that of the Companion cavalry.

Although these improvements must have enhanced the overall quality of the Macedonian infantry, they were still soundly defeated when led by Perdiccas against the Illyrians in 359 BC.

### Philip's army

Philip succeeded to the Macedonian throne as regent for his nephew, the son of his brother Perdiccas in the year 360/59 BC. At the time of Philip's succession, the Macedonian military was in a state of disarray as a result of Perdiccas' thorough defeat and the loss of 4,000 soldiers at the hands of the Illyrians. This, combined with the fact that the Macedonians were facing threats from four spheres, reinforced the need for immediate military reforms. Although it is difficult to determine whether Philip was the innovator or continuer of many of the reforms that took place, he rapidly undertook a series of important reforms, continuing and expanding upon what had been started by Archelaus and Amyntas' eldest son Alexander II. Thus, at a time when the Greek states were relying ever more heavily on mercenary forces, Philip was creating a highly professional standing





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citizen army.

Philip received much of his military training, either directly or indirectly, from Pammenes, Epaminondas and Pelopidas while he was a hostage living in Thebes for three years. These three men were all generals of contemporary renown, the latter two being responsible for the military predominance of Thebes. Philip instituted some of the practices that he witnessed during this time such as the oblique (flank refused) formation of the phalanx, and cavalry attacks directed at the flank and rear of enemy infantry.

Although Diodorus Siculus infers that Philip's reforms took place in a very short period of time, all within the year

of his succession, it is far more realistic to believe that these reforms would have taken place over a prolonged period of time. It is probable that Philip's first reform was to increase the size of the army, immediately followed by the institution of a regime of rigorous physical training including repeated battle drills and long distance marches where the troops were required to carry all the equipment that they would normally carry into war. It is clear that Philip placed particular importance on the reorganisation of the Macedonian infantry. Although it is unlikely that Philip was the creator of the *hypaspistai*, it has been suggested that he re-trained them to be an effective link between

**Macedonian *pezhetaroi* training with the newly introduced *sarissa*. A rigorous regime of training set Philip's new army apart from the 'amateur' hoplites of the Greek world.**

the phalanx and the cavalry, creating a diverse but coordinated force. Philip was also apparently responsible for the increase in the size of the smallest Macedonian unit, the *decad*, from its original ten men to the sixteen-man group evident during Alexander's reign. Philip at least standardised and possibly supplied the equipment carried by the phalanx and thereby introduced several new innovations: the *sarissa*, a pike



substantially longer than the spear used by the standard Greek hoplite, and a smaller shield that was slung over the shoulder to accommodate the Sarrisa's need of both hands for effective use. He also lightened the armour worn by the phalanx troops and packed the phalanx formation more densely.

Philip also reduced the amount of non-fighting personnel that accompanied the army. After Philip's reforms, a phalanx was no longer permitted to have a multitude of shield-bearers, but was restricted to one porter for every ten infantrymen, who would carry that group's ropes and grindstones. The cavalry received a similar restriction and were allowed only one groom each. Philip also reduced the number of wagons accompanying his forces, which would have both freed up many to serve in a direct military capacity and also sped up the army's movement, an element that Philip and Alexander were to use to great strategic advantage.

Philip was also responsible for pioneering the introduction and use of siege equipment into the Macedonian army, making previously unassailable cities vulnerable to his attacks. This, therefore, eliminated the necessity of blockading and starving the inhabitants into submission, which was an extremely time-consuming exercise fraught with as many hazards for the besiegers as the besieged. Up to that point, Greek cities had made little or no use of siege equipment, largely because such equipment had only recently been developed and because of the financial outlay involved.

Demosthenes' speeches, written for an Athenian audience and certainly anti-Macedonian in content, perhaps best demonstrate the importance and extent of Philip's reforms. These speeches concede several key points about the level of professionalism and experience that the Macedonian forces had been able to achieve. The Macedonian army during the reign of Philip had been significantly enlarged and improved until it was a far superior and larger field force than the Athenians could hope to match. In an attempt to depict the Macedonian soldiers as nothing more than ordinary soldiers with military experience,

Demosthenes reacted against the view of many of his contemporaries that the Macedonian *Corps d'elite* were a "superbly welded military force." The fact that the Macedonian army was a standing force allowed Philip to seize and control the initiative of the war; the permanent nature of this force further ensured that Philip was not restricted to campaigning only in summer, unlike most of the Greek states. Finally, Demosthenes' speeches clearly depict that the diverse nature of Philip's forces and the training that they received amounted to a force superior to that of the Athenians and the Greek states in general.

### Alexander's inheritance

The army that Alexander inherited from Philip was therefore a very different force to the one that Philip himself had inherited. Alexander was bequeathed a force with over a dozen years of experience and numerous successes. This incarnation of the Macedonian army under the leadership of Alexander demonstrated the ability to adopt a variety of formations. This indicates a pre-requisite amount of training and discipline required to maintain force cohesion, which is possibly the most important element in achieving victory with a densely packed phalanx. Furthermore, Alexander's army possessed a series of elite units, both Macedonian and otherwise, such as the companion cavalry, the Hypaspists, the predominantly Greek fleet, the Thessalian cavalry, the Agrianians and a large group of engineers, surveyors and artillerymen.

The professionalism and experience of this force was unmistakably displayed from the outset. Alexander's army was able to overcome situations that would have been considered too volatile for lesser forces to even attempt, turning potential routs into battle-turning events. This was first exhibited shortly after Alexander assumed the Macedonian throne and was forced to re-secure the northern boundaries of the Macedonian kingdom. Alexander's first opponents were the Thracians who had secured themselves in the mountains at the top of a steep narrow pass. Alexander's forces, being unable to approach the

Thracians from any other direction, were compelled to march straight up the pass into a waiting trap. Alexander was able to deduce the nature of the planned trap, which came in the form of a series of heavily laden wagons that would be rolled down the pass onto the Macedonian soldiers as they marched up, thus hopefully killing or wounding a large number of the soldiers and, perhaps more importantly, disrupting their battle formation and leaving them disorganised and vulnerable to attack.

Alexander ordered those of his troops that were able to, to split apart and allow the wagons clear passage through their ranks; those that were not able were to fall to the floor and lie beneath their linked shields allowing the wagons to pass over them. When the Thracians released the wagons the Macedonian soldiers did exactly what they had been ordered to do, the wagons passing through and over them without, according to Arrian, causing even a single casualty. This clearly illustrates the training and discipline of the Macedonian forces, as they were able to break formation and reform with such speed that the Thracians did not at any point feel that they had caused enough disruption to the Macedonian forces that they could attack.

Alexander's forces again displayed their professionalism when they fought the Triballians. In this instance, the Triballians were proving themselves difficult to draw into the open, preferring to attack from cover. Alexander needed to draw them out in order to most effectively use his whole force and not become bogged down in a protracted and damaging guerrilla action. Alexander sent the lightly equipped missile elements of his force to draw out the Triballians. When they were successful, he sent the Macedonian cavalry forward to attack the opponent's right wing and the cavalries of Bottiaea and Amphipolis to attack the left wing. He was then able, due to the discipline and training of his forces, to withdraw his lightly equipped troops through the phalanx whilst bringing the phalanx forward to attack the centre of the Triballian lines, a manoeuvre that could easily have



thrown a less experienced or less well-drilled force into confusion.

Further examples of the professionalism and experience of Alexander's army in Europe include his campaign against the Getae, where Alexander was able to get 1,500 cavalry and 4,000 infantry across the Danube at night in requisitioned dugouts. Possibly most astonishing of all, was the demonstration of how well drilled the Macedonian forces were to Glaucis, the king of the Taulantians. Alexander massed his phalanx 120 men deep. It then proceeded to execute a series of complex manoeuvres and facing changes in complete silence, clearly demonstrating the superior training and experience of the Macedonian army. This demonstration caused Glaucis to abandon a well-secured position for fear of facing the Macedonian forces.

It has been suggested that Alexander's actions against Glaucis depict the first recorded use of siege engines to provide field cover to an advancing army. The importance of the siege train to the Macedonian army is illustrated by several incidents in Europe, Asia and India. The three instances where siege equipment was used to take seemingly impregnable Persian assets were the sieges of Halicarnassus, Tyre and Gaza. These sieges clearly display the ingenuity of Alexander's engineers Charias and Diades, both pupils of Philip's siege engineer Polyidus. Alexander's forces

were able to gain entry into each of these fortified cities, a feat that would have been near impossible not many years earlier. These sieges demonstrate the vast array of siege equipment and techniques such as undermining, that Alexander had at his disposal. Torsion catapults, stone-throwers, battering rams, siege towers and dropping gangways where all put to use and could be mounted on ships if necessary as was the case at Tyre.

### The Persian campaign

Alexander's Persian campaigns display instances where the professionalism of the Macedonian forces was especially highlighted. Alexander's arrival at the Granicus river saw the Persian forces already marshalled into two distinct groups: the Persian cavalry at the river bank and the Greek mercenary infantry, stationed further back on a rise. The situation presented the Macedonians with a difficult river crossing made more daunting still by the fact that 20,000 Persian cavalrymen were arrayed on the opposing bank. Alexander's decision to attack the numerically superior Persian forces immediately displays what many authors have described as his rashness, but what can also be viewed as confidence in the professional nature of his forces. The consequent victory demonstrates both their flexibility and the co-operative nature of this force.

The flexibility of the Macedonian army is displayed by the change of

phalanx depth employed, normally sixteen deep. At the Granicus, they fought only eight deep, allowing the Macedonians to extend their battle line until it equalled the length of the Persians' line. This also ensured greater manoeuvrability whilst crossing the river. The crossing of the Granicus contained the greatest potential for disaster; however, the Macedonian forces not only crossed the river in an oblique formation, but by moving upstream threatened to flank the Persian cavalry. In the end, what allowed the Macedonians to win was their ability to utilise the variety of troop types they had available in a coordinated manner: using the cavalry to break the Persian lines, the peltasts who had outflanked the Persian battle line to assist the cavalry and the phalanxes to rout the Persian cavalry. The coordinated nature of Alexander's forces is further displayed in the defeat of the Greek mercenary forces, who received a frontal attack from the Macedonian infantry whilst the cavalry attacked their flanks and rear.

The battle at Issus again displays the flexibility with which the phalanx could be utilised. Prior to the commencement of this conflict, the Macedonian forces were massed 32 ranks deep, creating a more compact double depth formation. However, as the Macedonian forces advanced into more open terrain to engage the Persian army of Darius, again situated on the opposing bank of a river, Alexander expanded the front line by moving the rearmost ranks to the flanks of the existing formation, until the Macedonian formation was only eight ranks deep. Forced to fight over difficult terrain and across a river, it is no surprise that the Macedonian line was broken during the battle; the fact that this did not result in the defeat and rout of the Macedonian army demonstrates the effectiveness of a well-trained and experienced force.

The battle of Gaugamela perhaps best demonstrates the worth of a smaller but superior force against a far larger conglomerate force with little or no training. Although the Persian king Darius had a massive numerical superiority going into this battle, and the Persian *Corps d'elite* in the form of the Immortals was present, the majority

### The Getae

Known to the Greeks as the Getae, these people were later known as the Dacians to the Romans. They lived in the area roughly analogous to modern day Romania. The Getae were first mentioned by Herodotus, who tells us of their subjugation and enslavement by Darius during his invasion of Greece. He describes the Getae as the "most manly and law abiding" of the Thracian tribes and tells us that the beliefs of the Getae differed significantly from other Thracian peoples. The Getae believed that they never died, rather that when they departed the mortal realm they joined their god Zalmoxis.

Herodotus also describes a particularly interesting religious practice of the Getae; they would send a messenger chosen by lot to Zalmoxis every five years. This messenger would be told what the Getae wanted from their god and he would be swung and thrown into the air so that when he came down he would land on the points of upturned spears held by his compatriots.

The messenger's departure from the mortal realm was seen as a favourable omen, however if he survived he was considered to be of poor character.



of his forces were raised from peasant levies and of no real military value. Darius' plan at Gaugamela therefore hinged on the success of certain elements within his army, those being the cavalry and the scythed chariots. Darius' defeat was clearly due to the ability of the Macedonians to ensure, by virtue of their training and experience, that these elements either played no significant role in the outcome of the battle (as was the case with the scythed chariots), or were defeated by the superiority of their opposition (as in the case of the Persian cavalry). Gaugamela again saw the Macedonian battle-line broken. But, as at Issus, the professionalism and experience of the Macedonian forces prevented the Persians from being able to capitalise and turn the tide of the battle.

Alexander himself must be considered a professional, trained to assume the role of commander and king from a very early age and with a great deal of experience by the time of his accession to the Macedonian throne. Throughout the Persian campaign, Alexander repeatedly proved himself to be an extremely experienced commander with an understanding of basic military tenets and the necessities required to win a campaign of that scale. From the outset of the Persian campaign, Alexander, with only a few notable exceptions (such as the slaughter and enslavement of the Greek mercenary forces at the battle of Granicus), displayed the foresight necessary to achieve his goals by maintaining the loyalty of his own forces and treating those who willingly surrendered to him benignly. This is particularly evident in his treatment of conquered cities: those who capitulated were treated benignly, while those that resisted were treated ruthlessly. This ensured that Alexander's encounters were potentially less costly due to the incentives for cities in his path to submit. Alexander continually made the best possible use of his forces and their strengths. Furthermore, Alexander's prolific use of reconnaissance illustrates the level



Found in the Tigris river, which Alexander's army crossed before the battle of Gaugamela, this Boeotian-type helmet was probably worn by a trooper of the Alexander's cavalry when it was lost. Now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK.

of professionalism that both he and his army had attained.

The battle of Gaugamela in particular highlights the professional nature of Alexander as opposed to the Persian king Darius. In the lead-up to the battle, Darius required the Persian forces to stay in battle formation for an extended period of time after having sighted the approach of the Macedonian forces. Alexander, noting Darius' predicament, allowed his forces to rest, build a secure camp and scout out the battlefield. The importance of these actions should not be underestimated as they allowed the Macedonians to recuperate, secure their baggage train and determine Darius' plan for the engagement while the Persian forces were standing in the sun and missing a night's sleep. This meant they were exhausted by the time the battle actually started.

### Conclusion

The army and commanders that Alexander had inherited from Philip were a truly professional force with a great deal of experience. This force had been active for over a dozen years before Alexander became its commander. The Macedonian army was a mixed force, offering Alexander a great deal of variety and flexibility, from light infantry through to heavy cavalry. Alexander would not have been able to achieve the numerous conquests that he did with a lesser force. The fact that the Macedonians had a standing

army fighting for a king and an ideal ensured that their loyalty far exceeded that which Alexander would have been able to get from a contemporary mercenary

army. The forces of Alexander the Great were therefore a good example of the ideal attributed to Socrates in Plato's *Republic*; although their 'tools' were of a superior nature to those of their opponents it was not these 'tools' alone that made them a superior force, but rather their quality. This quality can most appropriately be attributed to the reforms that Philip II had undertaken during his reign and the amount of training and experience that the army possessed by the time Alexander came to command it in his own right. ■

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# Tank, terror weapon or battle taxi?

## *The role of the chariot on the battlefield*

EVERYONE HAS PROBABLY READ OR HEARD SOME VERSION OF THE URBAN MYTH ABOUT HOW THE SPECIFICATIONS OF MODERN RAILWAY GAUGES RELATE TO THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE WHEELS OF THE ANCIENT CHARIOT. IN MOST VERSIONS OF THE MYTH THIS IS SPECIFICALLY A 'ROMAN WAR CHARIOT' AND THUS, TO THOSE OF US FAMILIAR TO ANCIENT WARFARE, THE MYTH COLLAPSES SINCE WE KNOW THERE WAS NO SUCH THING. BUT TO MOST PEOPLE THE MYTH IS ENTIRELY PLAUSIBLE SUCH IS THE POWER AND FASCINATION THAT THE CHARIOT HOLDS. WHETHER IT IS FROM FILMS LIKE *BEN HUR*, *THE TEN COMMANDMENTS* OR EVEN *GLADIATOR*, MOST PEOPLE THINK THEY KNOW WHAT CHARIOTS ARE ALL ABOUT; HOW THEY WERE USED AND HOW EFFECTIVE THEY WERE. THE TRUTH IS WE DO NOT.

*By Murray Dahm*

The chariot debate centres on how chariots were used and how effective they were. There are several other debates as well such as the exact origins of the chariot and debates within connected subjects such as the introduction of the domesticated horse and the composite bow. What most concerns us, however, is their use and effectiveness. Chariots are variously seen as mobile missile platform without peer, untouchable except by opposition

chariots; as battering rams akin to the modern tank ready to break through the enemy, or the terror weapons of the ancient world, ready to scythe to pieces any enemy infantry formations foolish enough stand their ground rather than run away. Homer famously, or perhaps infamously, portrays them as battle-taxis, taking noble warriors from one place of crisis on the battle field to another. This image seems similar to the way in which Caesar reported that

the British tribes used them in the 1st century BC. Below, we will examine each of these positions in turn after briefly covering some of the questions of sources and origins.

### Sources for chariots

Our source material for chariots and chariot warfare is in one sense vast: depictions of chariots 'in action' festoon the sculpture, reliefs and art of the various cultures from which they come. In many analyses of chariot warfare, arguments turn on the specific interpretation of the details of these artistic depictions. Literary sources from Egyptian hieroglyphs, Indian epics and Chinese chronicles through to Greek and Latin literature also record chariots 'in action'. Much of this material is problematic, however. In some cases an artistic depiction does not

The so-called Standard of Ur, showing Sumerian 'battle-cars' with solid wheels, pulled by a team of equids. Found in Ur (south of Bagdad in modern Iraq), it now resides in the British Museum, London.



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necessarily give us an accurate picture and often they do not stand up to the specific interpretation they are subjected to. Literary sources may also be misleading either through poetic licence, propaganda or misunderstanding. Innumerable cultures' mythologies involve chariots in some form; whether Mesopotamian, Chinese, Norse, Greek, Roman, Indian or Irish. The use of chariots in transport, sport and ceremony lasted much, much longer. Such was the status and aura they held long after their place on the battlefield was lost.

The earliest depiction of a chariot-like vehicle being used in a military context comes from the Standard of Ur in approximately 2500 BC. The Sumerian battle-car was a solid wheel cart with four wheels and a tall fronted but narrow, one-person-wide, car. A warrior stood behind the driver although a quiver of javelins was attached to the front of the car. The car was driven by four donkeys or other equids (but not horses). Some scholars reject that this battle-car was a chariot or even a proto-chariot since it lacks two of the elements essential to chariotry – the horse and the spoked wheel. Others see them as a natural first step towards the chariot.

### Chariot elements

The domesticated horse was an essential element of the chariot since it was faster and more manageable when tamed than the ass. The horse seems to have been introduced into the Near East in the third millennium BC from the Sredny Stog culture centred in the Ukraine or Botai culture from the Russian Steppe/Central Asia. The horse represented an animal of huge potential in agriculture, transportation and warfare. Among the first uses of the horse in the Near East was the teaming of horses to draw chariots in war and this technology came to dominate warfare for the next millennia at least in virtually every culture it reached. Arthur Cotterell summarises that "no ethnic or linguistic group seems to have been the sole originator of horse-drawn chariotry." Various arguments are put forward as to how chariots were introduced to various cultures and when – the Hyksos in Egypt, the Tocharians in China, the Indo-Aryans

in India. What is clear is that however the chariot was introduced, it soon produced an arms race among neighbouring, enemy cultures. We see armies with huge numbers of chariots – at the Battle of Megiddo in 1460 BC Thutmose III had 1000 chariots (and captured 924); at the Battle of Karkar in 853 BC the Twelve Kings could muster 3940 chariots against Shalmaneser III.

The next element essential to the chariot was the spoked wheel. Surviving chariots and depictions have anywhere between four and thirty-two spokes although in Mesopotamia, Egypt and Europe four, six or eight was the norm. The spoked wheel allowed for a lighter, faster vehicle than the apparatus required for solid wheels although the weight that could be carried was less. Throughout their operational life in the Near East various cultures experimented with a variety of chariot configurations which sought a balance between speed and stability. These two elements were contradictory since speed and manoeuvrability required a lightweight vehicle. A vehicle built only for speed would not be stable enough to provide a practical mobile missile or fighting platform. The use of chariots therefore seems to have forced a choice between speed and stability or a careful balancing of the two. Protection of the occupants was also a concern and various chariot configurations see the addition of (a) shield-bearer(s) and different types of armour for the charioteer and warrior. We have examples of two-man (Egypt, Greece, India, Britain), three-man (Hittite Empire, China) and four-man chariots (Assyria). According to Stuart Piggott's experiments, the Egyptian chariot could achieve speeds of 30 kph whilst others have argued that the four-wheeled Sumerian battle-car could travel at 15-20 kph.

The third essential element for the development of the chariot was the composite bow. The origins and development of the composite bow are matters for a separate debate. In terms of the chariot, however, scholars consider that the composite bow must have come first and certainly the dominant image of chariot warfare is that of the archer. Chariot archery is the emphasis of Egyptian reliefs, Indian epics and Chinese chronicles (although not the

Homeric epics). Cotterell goes so far as to argue that "quite possibly the chariot only became militarily significant when it was first combined with the composite bow." Chariots are, however, depicted as being used in other ways which brings us to the crux of the chariot debate. One last thing we need to consider before that, however, is the cost of keeping a chariot force.

### Cost of chariots

Chariots were a hugely expensive investment in time and resources. In centralised kingdoms they were owned by the state although in other tribal or feudal states members of the aristocracy provided their own. When you consider a chariot force, say Thutmose III's 1000 at Megiddo – that is at least 2000 horses (without spares) and 2000 men who need to be trained and provided for. Chariots were a way of displaying wealth and prestige, just as were the actions performed in them. We can glimpse the further expense in the chariots found in Tutankamun's tomb. Six chariots were found, all of them slightly different but with the same five components (wheels, axle, body, pole, yoke). The wheels were made from elm, the pole from willow and the spokes from plum, none of which are found in Egypt. Whilst these are royal examples, the wide variety of woods determined as best suited for each element suggest the high costs involved. If Thutmose III's chariots were similarly constructed then the implications for cost are huge, not to mention the complexity of international trade. The Manual of Kikkuli, a 15th century BC chariot horse training manual from Mittanni proposed a seven month regime for chariot teams and included training day and night, diet, and animal care. Cotterell believes that Kikkuli's manual was used across many cultures since the surviving versions are written in Hittite (from Hattusha, the Hittite capital) although the original was probably in Hurrian. There is also a translation into Akkadian. According to Cotterell Kikkuli provided "a foolproof method of preparing [...] chariotry for war." Many names and numerals within Kikkuli's manual are similar to Sanskrit and seem to relate to Indo-Aryan culture which has connections to the introduc-



tion of the chariot in India. The composite bow, which also took years to produce comprising of several layers of different material for maximum effectiveness, was likewise expensive. All of these elements, as well as training warriors and charioteers, added up. We should not be surprised that chariots were high status items. So how were they used?

### Archery platform *par excellence*

As we have mentioned, the dominant image associated with ancient chariotry is archery. Whether it is an Egyptian pharaoh mounted in his chariot running down his enemies or an Indian hero displaying miraculous skill with the bow by shooting his enemy's arrows from the sky, chariots and archery are inextricably linked. This fact has led several scholars to argue that virtually all ancient chariotry was used in the same manner – if chariots were mobile archery platforms without peer, why use them any other way? Classic chariot battle, like Megiddo, was therefore a matter of chariots pitted against one another with their archers striving to drive the enemy from the field. The skill of chariot mounted archers is emphasised in Egyptian reliefs where pharaohs are shown hitting targets while mounted. Authors like Robert Drews and Arthur Cotterell argue that chariots were solely archery or missile platforms and contend that other ideas about the uses of chariots are ill informed or plain wrong. Written sources almost universally bear out that archery was the main chariot weapon. Chinese Chronicles like the *Zuo zhuan*, and Indian epics such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* as well as Near Eastern sources reinforce the image of the chariot as an archery platform. The one additional function which this scholarly position allows is for chariots to also be armed with javelins, still a missile weapon – Rameses II added them to Egyptian chariots for instance and they were present on the Sumerian battle-car.

The position of chariot as missile platform alone is complicated by our sources for the best account of chariot battle from the ancient world: the Battle of Kadesh (1274 BC) between Rameses II and the Hittite king Muwatallis II.

We are told that Hittite chariots were three-manned and in the reliefs they are shown with a shield and spearman. According to the 'missile platform only' school this is misleading and has led to the other, erroneous, arguments about the use of chariots in the chariot debate. According to Drews, "Hittite chariot warriors were bowmen" and the spear was only used against infantry. Nic Fields recently hedged his bets by arguing that the chariot was "little more than a mobile firing- or fighting-platform." Others like Littauer and Crouwel have argued that thrusting a spear from a chariot would be impossible. Another possibility was that the depiction of a 'spear' is, in fact a javelin. Cotterell discusses the "modern misunderstanding about Hittite dependence on the spear" and that "the light, horse-drawn chariot was never used to charge into dense infantry formations. Above all it was a high-speed firing platform." Cotterell argues that Muwatallis' own chariot is depicted with an archer and, during the reign of Seti I Hittite chariots are shown with archers. It could therefore be possible that the spear chariots of the Kadesh reliefs are simply a way of artistically distinguishing between Egyptian and Hittite chariots.

### Battering ram

The battle of Kadesh also gives rise to the other main school of thought within the chariot debate – the 'battering ram.' This position does not deny that archery was the main way in which chariotry was used, but argues that the evidence of Kadesh suggests that the Hittites used them in a different manner. According to Mark Healy, "the Hittites viewed the chariot as essentially an assault weapon designed to crash into and break up groups of enemy infantry." At Kadesh the Hittite chariots crossed the Orontes river and smashed into the Egyptian P'Re division as it was marching, taking it totally by surprise. They then swung to attack the camp of Rameses' Amun division. The reliefs showing spear armed chariots seem to support this idea. The 'battering ram' school and the 'missile platform only' school are, however, arguing from the same set of evidence and the minutiae of details can be made to lean either

way. We saw above how some scholars contend that it would be impossible to thrust a spear from a chariot. There is a Mycenaean grave stele which seems to show a charioteer thrusting a spear. Alternative explanations have been made that what appears to be a couched spear is, in fact, the reins of the chariot. Mycenaean and Homeric chariots will occupy us in a moment. It is also worth noting that Chinese chariot-warriors used halberds from their chariots which would exert similar forces as spear thrusting.

The Hittite tactics at Kadesh have given rise to the idea that the chariot was a 'battering ram'. It was not, however, a classic chariot battle. The Hittite chariots caught the P'Re division on the march and, as is pointed out by Cotterell, after they charged through it they did not stay to destroy it utterly but moved on to the camp. Muwatallis had 3,500 chariots whilst Rameses probably had around 2,000 but only 500 were attached to each division of 4,000 infantry. Therefore at the camp of Amun Rameses only had approximately one quarter of his chariot force. The Egyptian reliefs would have us believe that Rameses himself was able to lead these chariots to victory over a force seven times its size. The problem with the 'missile platform only' school when it comes to Kadesh is this: if the Hittite chariots were also archery and javelin platforms, how did they not manage to destroy Rameses' chariots and the camp? One suggestion is that the Hittites stopped to plunder the camp before victory was won. Healy's argument, however, seems more sound and it reminds us of an important fact, often overlooked, in the chariot debate. Healy argues that Kadesh was not the mass battle the Egyptian sources describe but rather a 'reconnaissance in force' which escalated. The numbers of Hittite chariots engaged may therefore have been much less than our (Egyptian) sources suggest. Otherwise it is difficult to understand how Rameses could hold off such an overwhelming force until his reinforcements arrived. The other factor which makes this take on the battle more persuasive is that Muwatallis did not commit his infantry, and, despite the emphasis in our sources on the deeds of chariot-borne war-





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Though the armament of the crew is hard to discern, the severed heads hanging from the pole on this chariot might contribute to the idea of the chariot as 'terror weapon'. Detail of a Cypriot jug, dated to about 750-500 BC, now in the Museum for Pre- and Ancient History, Charlottenburg, Berlin.

riors, infantry was still the backbone of both the Egyptian and the Hittite armies. Infantry were numerically more important (if much less prestigious) in both armies. At Kadesh Muwatallis is said to have had 40,000 whilst Rameses had probably around 20,000. Egyptian, Assyrian, Hittite, Chinese and Indian armies relied on their infantry. Even Greek and Trojan armies relied on infantry. Still, the emphasis in our sources is on what the chariots did and, at Kadesh, especially on what Rameses did in his. This is echoed in other non-royal cultures where the emphasis is placed on the actions of the heroes in the *Iliad*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* and the Chinese chronicles such as *Zuo zhuan*. In the state of Jin

during the Spring and Autumn period (770-481 BC) each chariot was accompanied by 72 infantry yet these men don't receive a mention.

### Terror weapon

The idea of a chariot as a battering ram also has connection to the next school of thought in the debate. When tanks were used during the Somme Offensive in 1916 German newspapers described them as "The Devil's Chariots." The idea of the chariot as tank was clearly ingrained enough for this to make sense to 20th century readers but so was the idea of the chariot as a terror weapon. By far and away the most dramatic image of the chariot as a terror weapon comes from the scythed chariot, probably invented by the Persians in the fifth century. The image of scythed chariots carving their way through infantry formations is still with us. This 'terror weapon' school alone reminds us how difficult dealing with the chariots debate is since this use comes a thousand years after their use at Megiddo and well after their decline as an effective fighting weapon. This generally occurred after the development of effective cavalry

around 1200 BC (although the crossbow ended chariot dominance in China). What is more we find scythed chariots used and adopted by the Seleucids. And this is despite the fact that the scythed chariot was ineffectual as a weapon. At the battle of Cunaxa in 401 BC, the Greeks thwarted the Persian terror weapon easily. Likewise at Gaugamela Alexander's disciplined infantry dealt easily with Darius' scythed chariots, weapons for which he had carefully prepared the battlefield. Even Caesar (*Gallic War* 4.33) comments that the chariot was meant to terrify, and that was without scythes.

### Chariots in Homer

One last school of thought in the chariot debate is the 'chariot as battle-taxi' found especially in Homer. Homeric warfare is a debate by itself. One central point to that debate, however, is Homer's depiction of chariots. This has polarised many scholars since the chariot, whilst still an essential aristocratic and prestige vehicle, is described as (many use the term 'reduced to') a battle-taxi. The 'missile platform only' school rejects the Homeric depiction of chariots as utterly false. Homer's aristocratic warriors are carried into battle and then dismount to fight whilst their charioteer withdraws to a safe distance ready to rescue the warrior or transport him to another part of the battlefield. While there occasionally is fighting from chariots, generally all fighting occurs after a warrior has dismounted. Archery, although clearly important, is largely absent from Homeric heroic battle. This is despite its connection to both Achilles' and Paris' deaths and its role in Odysseus' return and revenge in the *Odyssey*. Homer is derided as being unaware of the true nature of warfare during the period of the Trojan War and that he does not understand the importance of the composite bow. Greenhalgh laments that "the Homeric poems reveal no conception of the proper tactical role of massed chariotry." Instead Homer offers either an amalgam of war from his own time and earlier periods or a fictitious account. That said, Homer does offer elements which are accurate such as the boar's tusk helmet, long out of use by the time he wrote in 8th century BC. There are



only three occasions where chariots are mentioned as working together in the 'proper' massed manner in the *Iliad*. Nestor advises that chariots should stay together (*Iliad* 4.293-309) and that:

*"Whenever a warrior gets within reach of an enemy chariot, let him thrust with his spear, since this is much the better way. In this way men of former time used to sack cities and walls."*

Yet this passage still talks of thrusting spears rather than archers. One point to note is that if Homer did not remember how chariots were 'supposed' to be used, neither did anyone else. Greek art from the Homeric period does not help us despite the chariot being one of its most common motifs. Warriors are almost without exceptions, shown mounted in their chariots. Geometric

**Mycenean amphoroid krater showing a three-man chariot and a sword-bearer(?) walking behind it. Approximately 1300-1250 BC, now in the Allard Pierson museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.**

art thus on the whole supports Homer's picture, but almost the entire focus of ancient Greek art historiography has been to identify Homeric subjects. We saw above how a Mycenaean grave stele showed what appeared to be a chariot warrior with a couched spear chasing down an enemy. There is a signet ring from another Mycenaean grave showing an archer mounted in a chariot although this may be a hunting scene. It is meagre evidence to mount an argument on either way. The heavy bronze corslet from Dendra is another complicating element in the chariot debate. Most argue that is indeed a chariot warrior's panoply – too bulky and inflexible for a foot soldier but ideal for a chariot warrior to be protected and still thrust a spear from a chariot body. Although it is the only complete example, fragments have been found at Thebes and it is found as a Linear B ideogram at Knossos, Tiryns and Pylos. Arguments that such a panoply would be too heavy for a warrior in a chariot do not stand up.

It should be pointed out that Homer's battle-taxi use of the chariot is cohesive and does work; there is nothing wrong with such a use of chariots. Accusations that he is reporting the use

of chariots from his own time, or making them up at a time when Greeks had forgotten how they were used, are not particularly helpful. The 'missile platform only' school ignores the other uses of chariots as can be seen in the later invention of the scythed chariot. This school cannot consider that Homer's system (or the 'battering ram' school for that matter) could have operated alongside the use of chariots as missile platforms. Put quite simply, they could have. The Assyrians are argued to have relied less on chariots than other Near Eastern armies because of the terrain in which they fought. Most of Greece is perhaps the least favourable chariot terrain imaginable, so it should come as no surprise that they were not used in the same manner as in the Near East or Egypt. When the Greeks took their chariots with them to Troy we should not expect them to have used them differently than they did at home. In Britain (terrain not ideally suited to the chariot) the chariot is used in much the way Homer describes (albeit 1000 years later) and yet British chariotry developed independently from Near Eastern and other chariot traditions. Caesar's description of British chariots validates Homer's picture:



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Detail of a lion-hunt scene with the chariot as missile platform. The archer, probably the local ruler, is protected by a divinity – the winged sun – while his driver guides the chariot. From Sakcegozu (southern Turkey), approximately 750 BC, now in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin.

*"First they drive around in all directions, casting missiles and generally throwing army ranks into confusion through the panic caused by the horses and the noise of the wheels. Then when they have wormed their way in between the cavalry squadrons, they jump down from the chariots and fight on foot. Meanwhile the charioteers gradually make their way out of the fighting, and station their chariots so that, if they are hard pressed by a host of enemies, they have a speedy retreat to their own side. Thus they provide the flexible mobility of cavalry and the stability of infantry in battle. By means of daily practice and exercises they ensure that even on the steepest of inclines they can hold their horses at full gallop, control and turn them swiftly, run*

*along the beam and stand on the yoke – and from there quickly get back to the chariot."*

*Julius Caesar, Gallic War 4.33*

One of the last uses of chariots in warfare seems to be the battle of Mons Graupius in AD 82 (Tacitus Agricola 35.3) where the chariots manoeuvred noisily but were ineffective. The idea of a scythed chariot, however, could be revived as late as the fourth century AD (De Rebus Bellicis 12-14, see AW II.6). Chariots could still exercise fascination on the imagination and that fascination is still with us even though arguments about how the chariot was used precisely may never be resolved. ■

*Murray Dahm is a regular contributor.*

#### Further reading:

- J.K. Anderson, 'Homeric, British and Cyreniac chariots', in: *American Journal of Archaeology* 69 (1965), pp. 349-352.
- A. Cotterell, *Chariot*. London 2004.
- R. Drews, *The End of the Bronze Age: Changes in Warfare and the Catastrophe ca. 1200 BC*. Princeton 1995.
- P. Greenhalgh, *Early Greek Warfare*. Cambridge 1973.
- N. Fields, *Bronze Age War Chariots*. Oxford 2006.
- M.A. Littauer and J. H. Crouwel 'Chariots in Late Bronze Age Greece', in: *Antiquity* 57 (1983), pp. 187-192.
- A. Nefedkin, *Chariotry of the Ancient Greeks*. St. Petersburg 2001.
- S. Piggot, *Wagon, Chariot and Carriage: Symbol and Status in the History of Transport*. London 1992.



## Neo-Hittite infantry

Immortal are a company specialising in a range of Assyrian, Greek and Persian miniatures, covering the late Biblical era through the rise of Cyrus the Great to the invasion of Greece and wars of the Peloponnese. The current Assyrian range includes chariots, cavalry and a good selection of armoured and unarmoured infantry and skirmishers.

Reviewed this issue are Neo-Hittite infantry, auxiliaries recruited from the states of the former Hittite empire (eastern Anatolia and Syria). The models are designed for the late or so called Neo-Assyrian period, although would do for Hittite or earlier Middle Assyrian Auxiliaries. As auxiliaries, these soldiers were common in the Neo-Assyrian army. The spearmen carry large woven reed shields, a common feature of that army. They wear bronze crested helmets and a small bronze disc on their chests. The archers are completely unarmoured; relying on the shielded front rank spearmen for protection. They carry a small sword or dagger as a side arm and carry a simple bow and a high capacity leather quiver.

The miniatures are well cast with no flash or mould lines visible. Each is correctly proportioned anatomically. This does give the miniatures an overall 'thin' look but this should be seen as other miniatures being too wide rather than these miniatures being too thin. The detail is very good and the models historically accurate, being modelled on the most up to date archaeology for this period.

Size is 28mm from foot to eye, so compatible with most



**Scale:**

28mm

**Manufacturer:**

Immortal miniatures

**Address of Manufacturer:**

[www.immortalminiatures.com](http://www.immortalminiatures.com)

**Reviewer:**

Guy Bowers

existing ranges, although they may look slight compared with some of the more bulky and larger models on the market. They will easily fit in with similar sized ranges (Foundry, Eureka and Newline). Prices are GBP 5.50 per pack of 5 and GBP 3.50 for three command. These would be a welcome addition to any 28mm Assyrian or Babylonian army. These are some nicely sculpted figures an excellent range for ancient gamers and collectors. Recommended.

## Iberian Warrior, 3rd-2nd century BC

The subject here is unusual. Normally figures from the period of the Punic Wars concentrate on the Roman army (who, after all, won). By contrast, Rome's enemies get short-changed. Part of this may be just because more information is available for one than the other, of course, although there is more now appearing in the academic literature and not all of it is in Spanish either.

This kit comprises eleven finely cast pieces (one being the base). As with most modern manufacturers, very little effort is required to clean up the various components and the fit of all parts is excellent, with large securing lugs. For once this even applies to the shield where the left hand is integrally cast instead of the usual weak joint. Conversely, the helmet plume did require a fixing hole to be drilled into the helmet but this is easily accomplished even using a drill and pin-vice if an electric drill is not available. The pose chosen is an active one but is not extreme.

The kit comes with a small essay on the Iberian warrior of the 3rd-2nd century BC, together with detailed painting instructions (in four languages!) I would, however, have welcomed rather more information as to the source of this knowledge. It's all very well to be told that the shield is (quote): "decorated with stylised figures and totemic animals of the warrior's tribe, e.g. wolf or fox" but what did these look



**Order code:**

75-063

**Scale:**

75mm

**Designer:**

Maurizio Bruno

**Manufacturer:**

Pegaso Models

**Address of manufacturer:**

[www.pegasomodels.com](http://www.pegasomodels.com)

**Reviewer:**

Dr. Mike Thomas

like, and where can I find out?

Pegaso are to be congratulated on stepping 'outside the box' and giving the modeller something different as well as interesting, particularly when the offering is as good as this one.



# *Armas de la Antigua Iberia – de Tartessos a Numancia*

## (Weapons of Ancient Iberia from Tartessos to Numantia)

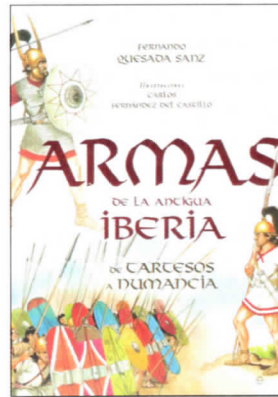
This book, although at present only published in Spanish, is a 'must' for all those interested in Ancient Warfare. Indeed, it may be described as a 'model' for how books on the subject should be in similar fashion to the author's earlier *Armas de Grecia y Roma* (2007), in similar format from the same publisher, with the same illustrator, which covered Greek warfare from the age of the hoplite to Roman warfare until the sack of Rome in 410 AD. The book itself is beautifully produced on the finest gloss paper, and its production values are second to none.

The subject matter is the weaponry of Iberian warriors from Bronze age Tartessos circa 800 BC through to the fall of Numantia during the Roman conquest in 133 BC. It is divided into three unequal parts – 'Time and Space', four chapters of just 28 pages giving an overall introduction and a brief look at each of the periods; 'Offensive and Defensive Arms', twelve chapters and 96 pages describing in detail the weapons, both offensive and defensive of the Iberian warrior, the subject matter of the book, and finally the third part: 'Warriors, Battles and Society', seven chapters of eighty-four pages covering the historical place of these weapons and the men who wielded them.

The first part is largely introductory background material of early Iberia, its historical setting, and a brief account of archaeology in Iberia. This is followed by a description of Tartessian Bronze age and early Iron age weapons from the seventh century BC to the fifth century BC, followed by an overview of Iberian and Celt-Iberian weaponry from the fourth to second centuries BC.

The second part deals with each of the main Iberian offensive and defensive weapons in turn: various swords and daggers, arms that Rome subsequently copied, spears, throwing weapons such as the *pilum* and all-iron *soliferreum*, the slings of the Balearic isles, the iron and steel metallurgy of Iberian arms, then come defensive arms, the *caetra* circular shield, the *scutum* type body shield, helmets both metal and organic, and finally body armour, with six to eight pages giving an in depth look at each subject.

Finally, in the third part, an excellent if relatively brief history of the period is given, beginning with Iberian mercenaries who served Syracuse, Greeks, Carthage and finally Rome. Next there is a discussion of the Iberian Princes Indibilis and Mandonios, struggling to maintain their independence whilst being caught in the middle of the titanic struggle between Carthage and Rome that was the second Punic War. They were initially allied with the Barca brothers Hannibal and Hasdrubal, and after the tide turned against Carthage in Spain, became allies of Scipio in 208 BC. After his departure in 205 BC for Africa and his confrontation with Hannibal, they made their bid for independence (ties and alliances were generally considered personal in Iberia, and with Scipio's departure they considered themselves relieved of any obligations to Rome) which ended in disaster. Then follows the history of later rebellions, and Cato's campaigns. The



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Fernando Quesada Sanz, illustrations by Carlos Fernandez del Castillo

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www.eferalibros.com

**Reviewer:**

Paul McDonnell-Staff

author then debunks the idea that Iberian warriors mainly engaged in guerrilla warfare, pointing out that they were not averse to pitched battle and to similarities between Iberian and Roman tactics and equipment. There follows a similar description of the Celt-Iberians of the Meseta region and their spirited resistance to Rome culminating in the tragedy of Numantia, and a brief description of the final campaigns in north-western Spain and the warriors who resisted until the reign of Augustus. Final chapters place the finds into their archaeological context and discuss the Iberian and Celt-Iberian concepts of war and comparisons are made between Iberian warriors and their equipment and tactical methods, and the rest of the Mediterranean world, and concluding:

*"Ultimately, the impression arises that if during the first decades of the fourth century BC the Iberian world had developed and practiced forms of warfare not too different from those practiced in the Greek or Roman world not long before (citizen militias and/or clientelae, heavy infantry combat in more or less structured units and lines, with a limited role for light infantry and cavalry), by the end of the third century BC the gap between the quick development generated in the Hellenistic area and also in the Roman world, and the comparatively conservative 'Far West' of the Iberian Peninsula, had become wider and, in the end, insurmountable." (reviewer's translation)*

The book is profusely illustrated with excellent large photos of original artefacts, sculptures and artworks, and modern reproductions, including re-enactors, as well as superb artwork by the illustrator Carlos Fernandez del Castillo reconstructing the various warriors, their equipment, and historical scenes. This approach is very well balanced, allowing readers to see for themselves the original item, and then how it might have been as new, and in context as part of a warrior's panoply. There are also excellent maps and tables, as well as clear diagrams showing the development of various items and their evolution (e.g. one for offensive weapons,



another for defensive ones, as well as separate diagrams for individual weapons)

The book also has as full a bibliography (29 pages!) at the end as one could wish for, as well as a brief one at the end of each chapter – a useful feature for the serious student.

The writing style also deserves praise, for it is written for the layman or interested person rather than in scholastic terms, and the author keeps a good narrative flow, which educates in a way which is both enjoyable and informative. This reviewer, with very limited Spanish, had little difficulty reading the text (with the occasional aid of my wife and one or two Spanish-speaking friends).

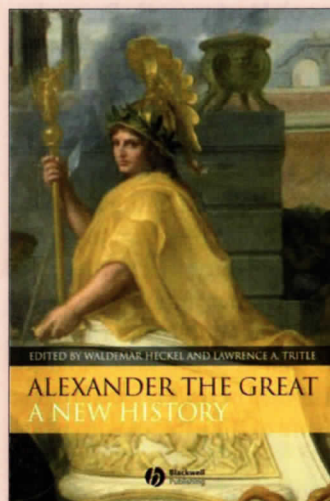
Overall, as stated earlier, this book is an absolute model for its kind, and other would-be authors of ancient warfare would do well to study it. At the same time its highly accurate content is conveyed in a way which makes it suitable for all, from casual reader to serious student. If the price is not cheap, do not let that put you off – be assured the buyer is getting real value for money. This book is thoroughly recommended for all levels of readership. Dare one hope that an English translation of this book and its predecessor *Arms of Greece and Rome* will be forthcoming? Or that a third volume, for example, *Arms of the Celts* might be in preparation?

## Alexander the Great. A new history

Once, Alexander was portrayed as a noble conqueror, who aimed at the unification of humankind. Although many people are still familiar with this interpretation from TV – the Macedonian king was presented in this way during the opening ceremony of the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens – or the internet, it is outdated. Since the horrors of the Second World War, historians have become suspicious about 'Enlightened Political Leaders Fighting For Great Ideals', and since Decolonization, western scholars have learned to appreciate the cultural achievements of the Near East. They also discovered that the spread of Greek civilization was not always a blessing. For example, the "the ladder of interrogation" (i.e., torture) was introduced in the courts of Babylonia. With these things in mind, historians have painted a different portrait of Alexander, using various shades of grey and black.

Where two diametrically opposed views can exist, scholars have usually fallen victim to a false dichotomy ("if Alexander was not good, he must have been bad"). In situations like these, often a third view will arise that offers something new and explains how the earlier perspectives could have been created. This has indeed happened. Over the past three decades, many cuneiform sources have been published, and a new synthesis on the history of Achaemenid Persia has been created. Some of Alexander's acts can now be explained as accommodation to eastern legal practice. Certain terrible punishments that were once explained away or interpreted as evidence of Alexander's cruelty, are now seen as a way to continue Persian customs. The Macedonian king wanted to be an Achaemenid.

In *Alexander the Great. A New History* Waldemar Heckel and Lawrence Tritle present several articles, mostly written especially for this book. Compared to similar publications, the quality ranges from better-than-average to good. There's an interesting piece on Alexander's Macedonian background and there are two articles on the successors; we can read about Alexander's court, army, cults, sex life, mother, conquests, portraits; his relation to Greece is the subject of two articles; Darius and Alexander's relation to the Persian Empire are dealt with in two pieces; the fashionable subject of 'the Roman Alexander' is present too, and the final chapter is on the paintings of LeBrun and the Oliver Stone movie.



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Waldemar Heckel and Lawrence A. Tritle (eds.)

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www.wiley.com

**Reviewer:**

Jona Lendering

Does the book offer, as the title suggests, a new Alexander? Not yet. Some authors ignore the potential of the cuneiform evidence. We can hardly blame them, because these sources are published frustratingly slowly and it is still possible to write an interesting article with the old evidence.

The simple truth is that, although there is a new synthesis of the history of Achaemenid Empire in general, new cuneiform sources for the reign of Alexander are still scarce. It was only in 1993 that scholars realized that the Persian king mentioned in the chronicle known as ABC 8 was not Darius the Great but Darius III. The consequences of this redating are still debated.

It's just one of about 100,000 unpublished Babylonian tablets in the British Museum. There are simply too many texts, and there are not enough funds, to publish them. One day, we will overcome the old good/bad Alexander dichotomy, but for the time being, scholars cannot realize the full potential of the cuneiform evidence. In short, a revolution has started, but it is too early to know its consequences. *Alexander the Great. A New History* can, therefore, not yet offer a new Alexander. His portrait is right now being painted. Still, for the time being, this is a state-of-the-art series of articles.

For a more extensive review and opinion piece, see <http://tinyurl.com/Heckel>



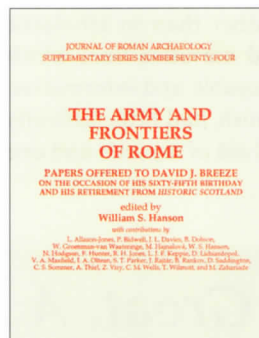
# *The Army and the Frontiers of Rome*

## Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series No.74

With the European Union covering much of the same land area once encompassed by the Roman Empire, and its politicians wrestling with the thorny issues of tighter border control, immigration and internal security, there is increasing interest in the way their ancient forebears addressed the same issues. *The Army and the Frontiers of Rome* is a timely supplementary volume of the Journal of Roman Archaeology. It is subtitled "papers offered to David J. Breeze on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday and his retirement from Historic Scotland." David Breeze is the co-author of the best-selling *Hadrian's Wall* first published in 1976 and now in its fourth edition from Penguin Books (2000). Most recently Breeze has been chairman of the Culture 2000 Frontiers of the Roman Empire project which seeks "to create a World Heritage Site encompassing all the frontiers" in Europe, the Near East and North Africa. Its first progress report was published in 2008.

That wide geographic scope is reflected in the papers published in the present volume. The subjects of the 22 papers are divided into five segments: army organisation and military installations, frontiers, military history, military logistics and supply and finally Roman and 'native' interaction in the north of Britain. The contributors are equally international, coming from all over Europe, as well as South Africa and the USA, attesting to the boundless appeal of the Romans. That so many contributed is also a measure of the esteem with which David Breeze's peers hold him.

All of the papers are, in different ways, provocative, thoughtful and rewarding. By way of a sampling, Boris Rankov argues that behind the expansionist policy of many Roman emperors was the 'secret of empire': the fear of challenges to their throne from frontier governors. Brian Dobson argues persuasively that the role of the Roman fort was not to be a "permanently manned strongpoint" but rather to provide "accommodation of the army off-duty". C. Sebastian Sommer concludes that Roman forts were positioned along the riverine frontier – such as the Danube – to control the rivers and tributaries themselves, not the routes across them.



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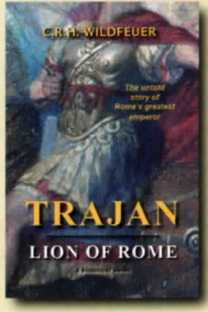
Reviewer: P. Lindsay Powell

Willy Groenman-Van Waateringe attempts to estimate the scale of the supply chain behind the Roman army, suggesting that one-and-a-half million goats were slaughtered annually just to provide the three million goatskins needed for tents, shield-covers, saddles and kitbags.

Brittany, Dacia, Egypt, north Pannonia and Southern Arabia are covered with issue-specific papers, however, studies on the forts in Britain are disproportionately represented, no doubt because of Breeze's nationality. The date and causes of the abandonment of the Antonine Wall are discussed by N. Hodgson; while Andreas Thiel examines the design of the Domitianic-Trajanic Odenwald limes and finds similarities with it and the 'Scottish Wall', hinting that the German barrier was a model later replicated in Britain. J.L. Davies argues that size really mattered in the garrison forts intended to hold Britannia for the Romans and shows how some installations established in the Flavian period in Wales and Scotland were enlarged in the Antonine. How native Britons and Romans got along is examined through the archaeology of several sites in Northern England (Lindsay Allason-Jones) and in particular Traprain Law (Fraser Hunter) and Burnswick Hill (Lawrence Keppie).

The JRA Supplement takes a traditional but narrow approach to discussing the frontiers, and indulges the research interests of the contributors. A more intriguing treatment of the same subject using interdisciplinary research is presented in the book *Frontiers of the Roman Empire* (Indiana University Press, 1996). In it Hugh Elton goes beyond the simple linear boundary approach and argues that the frontiers of the Roman Empire were a "fuzzy set of interlocking zones – political, military, judicial and financial" – involving civilians, not just the army.

This remarkably accessible publication is generously illustrated with figures and maps that support the text throughout. Each paper is referenced with footnotes and a full bibliography. One of the shortcomings of the 'conference papers' format is that the published version usually lacks an index, and that is the case here. That said, *The Army and the Frontiers of Rome* is a fascinating collection of valuable papers by some of the world's leading experts and there is something for everyone here.




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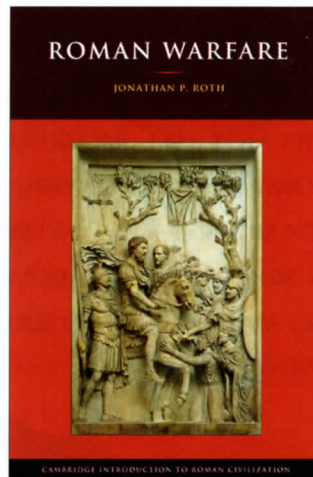
# Roman Warfare

"The story of Rome is the story of warfare." So begins Jonathan Roth's survey of some 1000 years of Roman warfare, from the regal period to the fall of the Western Empire in AD 476. The book is part of the Cambridge University Press series "Introduction to Roman Civilization," which is designed to introduce topics in Roman history and culture to students who have no background in the subject, with the target audience being high school students and undergraduates. The book contains no footnotes, and all Latin and Greek terms are glossed. At the end of each chapter, a number of 'links' point the reader towards key passages in the ancient sources. A bibliography provides a number of essential books for further reading. An additional bibliography for younger readers is included, as well as helpful links to relevant internet sites (Roth may make internet history, as Wikipedia is listed as a helpful and relevant source, the first such reference I have seen in a serious publication, and in my opinion, one that properly reflects the growing quality of internet resources). A comprehensive timeline and glossary of technical terms complete the book's battery of user-friendly features.

Roth has produced some heavy scholarly work on Roman military logistics in the past. It is remarkable how well he adapts his style for a broader topic and a wider audience. He does not dumb things down, although he makes the topic highly accessible. The book moves at a brisk pace. There are fewer than 225 pages of text, but Roth manages to hit all of the high points. Unlike some surveys, which cut corners by focusing almost exclusively on the Punic Wars, Late Republic and Early Empire, Roth covers every period of Roman history. The regal period and early Republic, often brushed aside, get a complete two chapters, out of a total of fifteen. I was especially gratified that Late Antiquity was given its just due, as the tumultuous period from the 3rd century crisis to the fall of the western empire enjoys a full three chapters.

Roth does not omit current scholarly debates, although he sums them up with admirable brevity. Survey materials often gloss over a great deal of complexity; it is surprising how much nuance Roth manages to pack in. He refuses to drop names in his discussions, which has both pros and cons. On one hand some readers may want to know where certain landmark scholars stand in key debates in order to facilitate focused follow-up reading (i.e. W.V. Harris on Roman imperialism or E. Luttwak on Grand Strategy). Nonetheless, name-dropping can quickly get out of control, and is contrary to the introductory spirit of the series.

Roth is not afraid to be blunt at times, especially when countering what he considers commonly held misconceptions. He emphasizes Roman important naval developments prior to the Punic Wars, reminds readers that the Masada fell after only a siege of weeks rather than years, and flatly states that "it was Gallienus who saved the Roman empire" during the 3rd century crisis. His discussion of the fall of the Western Empire in chapter 15 is particularly focused on breaking down



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**Reviewer:**

Michael J. Taylor

any notions of "barbarians at the gates", but rather emphasizes the process of state-collapse in the 5th century amidst on-going (and often successful) military operations by the Roman army.

The focus of the book is the grand narrative: geopolitics, grand strategy, soldier and society, etc. There is some relatively superficial discussion of weapons and formations. Battlefield tactics are not strongly emphasized. There is only a single 'red on blue' battlefield schematic, for the Battle of Cannae. A number of other important battles are given short inset discussions that briefly describe the setting, course, outcome, and significance of key battles such as the Battle of Sentinum (295 BC) or Catalaunian Plains (AD 451). Military figures also get inset profiles, but Roth is careful to highlight men often missed in the surveys: such as the 4th century consul Fabius Rullianus, the Vindolanda prefect Flavius Cerialis, and the soldier-saint Martin of Tours. Important generals such as Scipio Africanus, Marcus Agrippa and Domitius Corbulo are also featured.

Long-time subscribers of *Ancient Warfare* magazine may find this work too remedial for their tastes. But I learned a few things from the lively narrative – for example I did not know that the English phrase "parting shot" is a mispronunciation of "Parthian shot" referring to the Parthian habit of shooting backwards while retreating. Beginners (the intended audience) are quickly introduced to a tremendous amount of essential information, written in a highly accessible style. This is a perfect read for someone with a budding interest in Roman warfare, and because of the unfortunate centrality of war and violence to the Roman experience, it doubles as a fine introduction to Roman civilization at large.



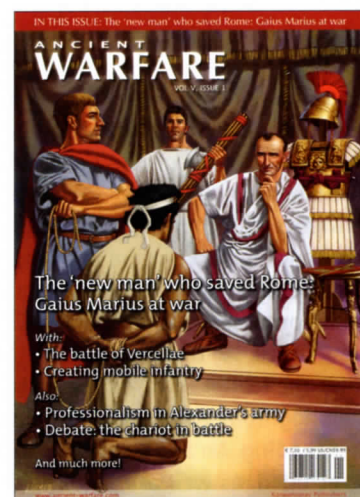
# Jugurtha surrenders

"WHEN DAY CAME AND HE WAS TOLD THAT JUGURTHA WAS NOT FAR OFF, HE PROCEEDED WITH A FEW FRIENDS AND THE ROMAN QUAESTOR TO A MOUND IN FULL SIGHT OF THOSE WHO WERE IN AMBUSH, AS IF HE WERE HONOURING JUGURTHA BY GOING TO MEET HIM. JUGURTHA CAME TO THE SAME PLACE UNARMED AND WITH ONLY A FEW FOLLOWERS, AS HAD BEEN AGREED, AND IMMEDIATELY ON A GIVEN SIGNAL THOSE WHO WERE IN CONCEALMENT RUSHED UPON HIM FROM ALL SIDES AT ONCE. HIS COMPANIONS WERE KILLED; THE KING HIMSELF WAS BOUND AND DELIVERED TO SULLA, WHO TOOK HIM TO MARIUS." SALLUST, *JUGURTHINE WAR* (113.5)

Johnny Shumate's depiction of what happened next shows Gaius Marius dressed in the formal toga of a Roman proconsul, with its broad crimson purple stripe, to receive his royal prisoner, Jugurtha. Behind him on its stand is the panoply of a Roman general. Note that the bronze cuirass is different from the 'muscled' Hellenistic type, being plain cut, but with elaborate decoration on the shoulder pieces and breast-plate. Behind him stands an attendant, a *lictor*, carrying the axe bound with a bundle of rods (*fascēs*) which symbolised a magistrate's powers. Before Marius stands his *quaestor* (deputy and quartermaster),



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found on the Capitoline and associated with Sulla's triumph over Bocchus (given in 91 BC). The bronze figure of a *lictor* is now in the Art Institute of Chicago, while the bust is an Augustan copy of an earlier work. Paired with a bust of Marius, it's usually considered to be Sulla. It now resides, with its partner, in the Glyptothek in Munich. ■



© Raffaele D'Amato

Lucius Cornelius Sulla, later called *Felix* ("the fortunate"), dressed informally in riding gear from his 'peaceful' meeting with Jugurtha. In abject misery kneels the Numidian king Jugurtha, betrayed by his father-in-law Bocchus, wearing the Royal diadem and a north-African calf-length tunic. The *Triumphus* for ending the Jugurthine War went to Marius, but credit for the capture, to Sulla. From this incident would grow a rivalry that fanned into Civil Wars, which would only end when Octavian founded the Empire and became Augustus.

The armor shown is a detail of a relief

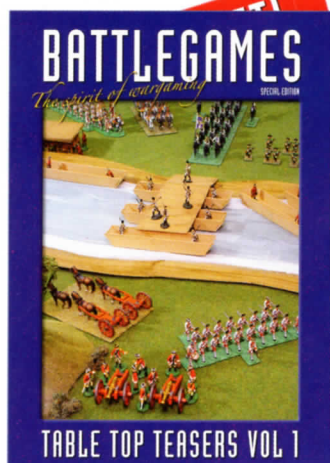


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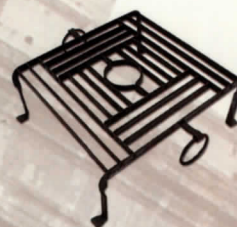
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